ESTIMATES OF JOHN CALVIN

I

For particular reasons, as will appear below, it is eminently worth while, and even necessary, to attempt as pertinent and as full an investigation of what has been said for and against Calvin as possible. To this I have been led particularly because of reading Miss Harkness's book, *John Calvin: the Man and His Ethics.* This book is well written, and is rich in its material. Miss Georgia Harkness, Ph.D., is an ordained minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church; also Professor of Philosophy in Elmira College, New York. In writing the book the author says that she has "combed the fifty-nine volumes of the *Calvini Opera*, and attempted, as far as the compass of the book would permit, to make available in English the most pertinent source material from Calvin's writings". She begins her book as follows:

"'As it is easy for malevolence to calumniate his character, so the most exalted virtue will find it difficult to imitate his conduct.' So wrote John Calvin's biographer and successor in the Genevan Church, Theodore Beza, eleven years after the great Reformer's death. For almost four centuries Calvin's memory has been honoured and vilified. No man in the history of the Church has been more admired and ridiculed, loved and hated, blessed and cursed."

When D. L. Staehelin was writing his biography of Calvin, he received a letter, in which these words are found: "I know not how to view that figure in its humanity and thus to appreciate it. He looks to me like ice and granite, as a man of a different species." Bossuet is the author of the oft-quoted words: "*Un homme triste, un esprit chagrin.*"

Rev. O. Douen, Secretary of a Bible Society, said of Calvin: "Of a dry and hard spirit, logical and intellectual in the extreme, Calvin lacked the warmth of heart that made Luther so lovable. His theology is without bowels of mercy. . . . A man of frail and weak body, excessively frugal, cold, peevish, austere, the enemy of pleasure or recreation in any form, ill-disposed to the arts and to music, embittered, violent, wrathful, impatient of contradiction, intolerant, tyrannical, capable of the most

atrocious cruelties in order to make his own ideas triumph—such was Calvin." (Doumergue, EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY, January 1929, p. 61.)

Dr. Harkness dedicates her book "To the memory of John Calvin, a Man of Great Faults and Great Virtues." In how far the former characterization may be correct is one of the main objects of this investigation to ascertain, because "great faults" seriously discount the total impression of the greatness of a man. A misunderstanding of the man and of his doctrines, and a persistent inflation of these "great faults" have seriously damaged Calvin's fame, so that the man does not stand forth in his full personality as he really is. Misrepresentation and slander are things which, if persistently carried on, gain in volume which very circumstance leads to their ready acceptance generally. That is the reason why so many ministers, even in Reformed Churches, having neglected a thorough study of Calvinism, or forgetting what they once knew, first become somewhat indifferent to it, and then, on account of the active propaganda of its enemies, always very vociferous, lend an ear to them and soon become prejudiced against it, joining the ever-swelling chorus of misrepresentation.

In her Preface, Dr. Harkness pens these gracious words: "The significance of Calvin's ethics has been neglected in the making of many books upon his theology. Yet even in his own day, the impression made by his moral ideas was probably as great as that made by his doctrine, and it has been more lasting. Through various channels—mainly French, Dutch, Scotch and English—Calvinistic morality made its way to American shores, and the morality of the Protestant portion of the Western world still bears its stamp. The Puritan conscience is in large measure the Calvinistic conscience, and in spite of tendencies to decry everything 'puritanical', the Puritan conscience, or its effective heritage, persists."

In the Conclusion of her book, Dr. Harkness says of it: "It aims simply to tell the truth about Calvin. Its author has tried to present without prejudice the story of this man of great faults and great virtues, and to give an accurate account of his moral theory and practice. As Calvin said of himself, 'I have not to my knowledge corrupted or twisted a single passage . . . and when I could have drawn out a far-fetched meaning, if I had studied subtlety, I have put that temptation under foot.'

The author is not a Calvinist, either by Church affiliation or conviction, and holds no brief for Calvin or Calvinism. But with the study of this rugged figure has come a growing sense of comradeship—almost of personal friendship—and it may be that these chapters have endeavoured, beyond their writer's original intent, to lift from Calvin's shoulders some of the opprobrium which has settled there through the centuries" (p. 259).

II

How one can blind himself to the facts is shown in an article in the *Hibbert Journal* of October 1907, by Dr. Thomas C. Hall, one time Professor of Christian Ethics in Union Theological Seminary, New York. He says this: "As a matter of fact the ethical system of Calvin is profoundly reactionary, scholastic and Roman Catholic in aim and method. . . . On such a basis no Protestant ethics can be built up. . . . Calvinism has been singularly barren in point of fact in ethical work." Dr. Emile Doumergue, who wrote the last and fullest biography of Calvin, thus comments on this: "Here is the truth—('as a matter of fact')—which has escaped Schweitzer, Lobstein, Kuyper, Staehelin, DeWette, Gass, Ziegler. . . . We shall take good care not to discuss this rare, this unique series of oddities. We should be afraid of weakening the convincing force of this *reductio ad absurdum* of the Ritschlian theories. . . . The only conclusion that can be drawn from this is that there are theologians who are not afraid to be ridiculous" (*Calvin and the Reformation*, pp. 7-9).

Dr. Harkness, though not even a Presbyterian like Dr. Hall, continues in this fairer estimate: "To all but a few of those whose religious or moral ideas have been moulded by him, Calvin is but a name. The name connotes usually a shadowy figure—often a sinister figure—one who believes in predestination and other strange ideas that nobody now accepts. Yet the thin, imperious theologian who taught predestination and ruled Geneva in the quarter-century which spanned the middle of the sixteenth century, was one of the strongest personalities of all time. Frail in body, gigantic in intellect, and iron-clad in soul, he laid the stamp of his personality on future Calvinists and others. He was a man of great faults and great virtues, and

these faults and virtues were crystallized into a moral code which after four centuries is still effective in our social order" (vii).

While many have criticized Calvin and Calvinism, such men as Froude, Bancroft, DeTocqueville, etc., not Calvinists themselves, praise the man and the system. We appreciate the fair spirit of Dr. Harkness, but we think that the addition of the words ascribing to him also "great faults" along with his "great virtues" is a sort of *bon mot* whose cleverness and plausibility deceived and led astray. After a careful examination of Calvin as a man and of his work, we find very little that can justly be marked against him as great fault. The main object of this article is to look into this matter. From a full survey of the facts and from a careful appraisal of various circumstances, we verily believe that John Calvin is a man of so singularly high and noble a kind, having such exalted ideals and living up to them so consistently, that he can scarcely be rated below the Apostle Paul. Calvin deserves to be honoured to the full, for what he was and did. Says Schaff: "There are few men whose life was so strict, so regular and well-ordered as the life of the Reformer of Geneva. It presents a beautiful unity and harmony on the basis of an unshaken firmness and absolute submission to the sovereignty of God." Admiration for such a man should be spontaneous and unstinted. However, it is a grievous commentary upon human nature—even among the cultured—that misconstruction and a gratuitous adhesion to erroneous estimates, due to bias, will persist despite repeated correction. Many things have been alleged against Calvin, then disproved; and still the calumnies persist. Why? Many *will have* it so, as, somehow, human nature cannot bear to have anyone tower too high above his fellows. Aristides the Just has been considered one of the most illustrious statesmen and patriots of antiquity and one of the most virtuous public men of any age or nation. Nevertheless, during the process of voting on his ostracism, it is related that a certain man gave his vote against him, saying: "I do not know him; but I am tired of hearing him called Aristides the Just!"

Among the "great virtues" of Calvin the outstanding one, which dominated all his thoughts and acts and which he consistently honoured throughout his life, was the recognition of the sovereignty of God and his absolute submission to Him. This caused him to put his own comfort and honour out of

consideration. His mottoes were: "*Coram Deo*" and "*Cor meum velut mactatum Domino in sacrificium offero*". Says Schaff: "He lived constantly in the fear of God, and laboured most earnestly and consistently as one of His most faithful servants, to promote the honour of his heavenly Master, and to reform His Church on the basis of His Holy Word. 'I would rather', he says, 'ten thousand times be swallowed up than not to obey what the Spirit of God commands me to do through the mouth of His prophets.' Unwilling to take any glory to himself, Calvin forbade the erection of any monument on his grave, and the stranger asks in vain for the resting-place of his body in the cemetery of Geneva."

III

Calvin was ever a man of conscience, and resolutely performed his duty as he saw it. When in his early years he stopped at Geneva he met Farel who was quick to detect in Calvin a helper he needed to assist him in completing his arduous and responsible work. Of a timid disposition, Calvin at first declined with all the strength of his will, and made various objections. But Farel adduced one argument which was unanswerable. In an adjuration that was almost an imprecation, Farel declared, "I denounce unto you in the name of Almighty God that if, under the pretext of prosecuting your studies, you refuse to labour with us in the work of the Lord, the Lord will curse you as seeking yourself rather than Christ." At last Calvin yielded against flesh and blood.

Similarly, when, after he had been exiled from Geneva, the Council took steps to invite him back, Calvin "reluctantly gave his consent. It was no mere desire to be coaxed that led to this long delay. Calvin was doubtless pleased to be asked; no one of his temperament could fail to be pleased on being invited to return to a post from which he had been driven in defeat. But he genuinely dreaded in going back and taking up again the life of turmoil that he knew lay before him. He said he would sooner a hundred times die than shut himself up again in this hell of torment, and there is no reason to doubt the sincerity of his reluctance. Yet Calvin believed that the will of God must be done. No personal reluctance, in his judgment,

could stand in the way of public duty or the call of God. He finally consented in order not to be of those who have more care for their own ease and profit than for the edification of the Church " (Harkness, 19, 20).

Calvin was positive in his opinions. But it was not the positiveness of ignorant obstinacy. It was that of a mind which saw clearly, and for himself could not but respect his conclusions. However, positive as he was, you will find instances in his letters in which he gently consults with his friends, and willingly seeks to profit by their light. In his Commentaries you will find him again and again giving alternate views and allowing his reader to take his choice. Strong and assured as he was in the great outlines of the truth which he had exhaustively and critically studied, and which to the present day stand firmly grounded for those who share his spirit, neither even Calvin would have regarded himself infallible: he would have everybody bow absolutely before the Word of divine revelation.

" In every respect Calvin exhibited a degree of unselfishness which is as complete as it is honest. In his private life he was plain and self-denying. He always refused a high salary. During the early part of his stay in Strasburg he was desperately poor. He was promised a salary of $50 a year, but it was six months before he received any of it. In this interval he suffered cold and hunger and was forced to sell part of his library to buy food. A friend who learned of his poverty offered to supply him with money on condition that he would refrain from stating publicly his Reformed doctrines, but he was not to be bribed into silence " (Harkness, 15, 16). " His house was scantily furnished, but he was extremely neat. 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 financial assistance, and declined to accept anything in addition to his modest salary. During his last illness the Council wished to pay for his medicine, 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 inestimable value, and a material estate of from $1,500 to $2,000 " (Harkness, 54). Schaff says that exclusive of his library he left hardly more than $200.

IV

Was Calvin, then, an ascetic? Was that one of his "great faults"? In answer to this, Doumergue advises that Calvin's chapter on *Christian Liberty* be read; and he continues: "He wishes men to set themselves from the start against all monastic asceticism, as if God took pleasure in these material sacrifices. He shows that the ground is slippery; and that once the foot is set on the slope, one must go to the end. . . . If one begins to doubt whether it is lawful for him to use linen sheets, shirts, handkerchiefs, and napkins, he will not long be sure about using hemp, and at last he will vacillate as to the use of tow. For he will wonder if he might not eat without a napkin and do without handkerchiefs. Should he deem a daintier food unlawful, he will at last not dare to eat bread or common viands with an assured conscience before God, since it will always occur to him that he might sustain life with still meaner food. If he scruples to drink good wine, he will afterward not dare to drink the worst with a good conscience, or water that is unusually sweet and pure; in fine, it will come to this, that he will hold it a great sin to trample on a straw in his path. 'Liberty! Liberty!' says Calvin, 'without scruple of conscience or trouble of spirit, we ought to make such use of the gifts of God as has been ordained'" (*Calvin and the Reformation*, pp. 47, 48).

"What Calvin says of drinking and eating he repeats with respect to all the other joys of life. And he writes pages full of the most significant realism. Have his critics never read them? 'Why are the rich cursed, who have now received their consolation, who are full, who laugh, who sleep on beds of ivory, who add possession to possession, at whose feasts are harps, lutes, tambourines and wine? Surely the ivory and gold and riches are good creatures, permitted and even appointed for the use of men, and nowhere is laughing forbidden, or the acquiring of new possessions, or delight in musical instruments, or drinking wine, etc.' What becomes of the stereotyped remarks about the sombre, morose and 'Franciscan' asceticism of Calvin?" (*Calvin and the Reformation*, pp. 49, 50).

Ritschl wrote in 1880: "As Calvin, personally, did not need recreation, he saw only pressing temptations to sin in the so-called forms of recreation and in the luxury that followed them. . . . For this reason he combated everything that pertained to the

gay and free joyousness of life and luxury" (*Calvin and the Reformation*, p. 50). Dr. Harkness presents the case fairly and correctly. She says: "A common misunderstanding must be corrected. Calvin was not in theory an ascetic. He never taught that one should deny himself the ordinary pleasures of life, or to live so frugally as to injure bodily well-being. He always counselled moderation, and the avoidance of both austerity and indulgence. Many gifts, he says, are bestowed upon us by the Creator, not for our necessity but for our pleasure. The beauty of flowers, foliage and fruit, the delicate tints of ivory and of marble, are given to delight the senses. It is our privilege and duty to use them for enjoyment. We must therefore discard that 'inhuman philosophy' which would make no use of the Creator's gifts except for absolute necessity, despoiling man of all his senses and reducing him to a senseless block" (p. 163).

Is it true that Calvin despised exercise? "Morus tells us of his habit of playing the game of La Cleff with the Syndics, and John Knox found him pitching quoits in his garden with his friends" (Dosker). Being a Frenchman, we should expect in Calvin a lively temperament. Schaff remarks: "The French character is naturally inclined to levity; but by the law of reaction it produces when once brought under the influence of religion a very high degree of seriousness." Calvin had not stifled the engaging qualities of French character, being entertaining, and pleasant socially. If at all, very heavy burdens and great responsibilities interfered with their full exhibition. But there are enough of delicate touches of humour and pleasantry which his critics overlook. His letters need only to be read to find traces thereof, as he confides with his friends.

Dr. Harkness raises the question why Calvin opposes so many forms of enjoyment which seem proper. Correctly she gives as the solution that while many things are not evil in themselves, man is so prone to abuse them that they become a snare for the welfare of the soul. Even to-day Christian ethics is constantly involved in difficulty in trying to draw sharp distinctions between what may be allowed or not. Calvin and the Puritans after him may have been severe, but at root the concern was one of spiritual safety. The danger is ever to fall upon the Scylla and Charybdis of either a baldness or sensuousness.

V

Among the faults of the Calvinist it is included that he is an opposer of art. Of course Calvin gets his share of the blame. Certainly among the Puritans of England and later in America art suffered severely. " One who visits the cathedrals in England will find it hard to forgive Cromwell for having smashed so many acres of priceless medieval glass. There was an unimaginative practicality about Calvinism which was hostile to the spirit of the Renaissance." To this it must be replied that the excesses of Anabaptism, the unreasoned fanaticism of passion and various revolutionary activities found their opportunity in the freedom for which Calvinism paved the way, but are not the natural fruits thereof. Hence, whilst fearful that many of God's good gifts could be readily abused, a thing which constrained Calvin to advocate more sobriety than he otherwise would have insisted on, nevertheless Calvin praised art. " When Scripture mentions the first appearance of arts in the tent of Jubal who invented harp and organ, Calvin stresses the fact that in this passage there obtains a treatment of the striking gifts of the Holy Ghost ; he testifies that in this taste for art God had ' enriched Jubal's generation with excellent gifts ' ; and he declares loudly that these discoveries of art were brilliant evidences of Divine benevolence. . . . In all *artes liberales* in the more important as well as in the lesser kind, God's praise and glory must be served. Yea more, the arts are given us for the purpose of furnishing us comfort in our sunken condition of existence " (Kuyper). Calvin sharply called Mr. Cop, his colleague in Geneva, to order when the latter raged against art as such. Kuyper argues that music in its best development, and particularly in sacred song by the people, is due to Calvin's initiative. Under Calvin's eyes Bourgeois worked in Geneva in furnishing the virile tunes used in psalmody. Goudimel, a Calvinist, and teacher of the famous Palestrina, further developed music. Says Kuyper : " Roman Catholic writers are obliged to acknowledge that the ravishing wealth of beauty to which both in the previous and in our own century we have attained in the realm of music, must largely be attributed to the church hymn of the heretics." And Kuyper concludes : " But when from the Catholic side Calvin is accused of æsthetic obtuseness, as they ignore our splendid past also in matters of music, the reminder needs to

be made that the genial Goudimel was murdered on St. Bartholomew's night through Catholic fanaticism; which naturally leads to the question whether *he* has not forfeited the right to complain of the quiet of the woods who with his own hand had caught and murdered the nightingale" (Stone Lectures).

We shall next take up another alleged great fault in Calvin's rule over Geneva. The charge has often been made, and the idea is quite generally accepted, that Calvin was a dictator and ruled Geneva like a tyrant. However, it seems a far cry that he to whom the liberties of Europe and America owe so exceedingly much, who is the father of republics, who sought nothing for himself and laboured for the good of Church and State, could be a tyrant. That is not tyranny which exhibits a marvellous co-ordination of correct form and beneficent application.

"To understand the fightings and fears and final victory of Calvin in Geneva, it is necessary to remember what he was aiming at. He was not attempting, as is often suggested, to make himself the personal dictator of the city. Nor was he trying to unite Church and State in an ecclesiastical absolutism. What he was trying to do was to make Geneva a city in which the Word of God should be the ultimate authority in matters of morals and of belief. This meant, of course, a rigid discipline, and a discipline in which the Church must play a very important part, but not a régime in which either Church or State could lose its identity or allow its functions to be swallowed up" (Harkness, 21).

All these disciplinary measures betoken much power on the part of Calvin; but this does not mean that he had his own way in everything. On numerous occasions the Council took pains to let him know that he was still a hired servant of the State. To the older citizens of Geneva Calvin always remained an alien, and he became a citizen only four years before his death. With strict impartiality the Syndics, as late as 1554, when Calvin had mastered all opposition, referred his books which he would publish, to the censor as well as others. Two years later Calvin wrote: "I am living like a stranger in the city." He was, therefore, far from being a dictator, although the Council availed itself frequently of his wise counsel, when needed. On various occasions Calvin failed to secure the backing of the Council.

Tissot exclaims: "Truly, here is curious omnipotence and a dictator much restricted in his movements! His propositions rejected, his words submitted to inquiry, his writings examined!" While the Council and the Genevan people were quite willing to ask his advice on many subjects, they were not willing to place their ancient liberties in the hands of any dictator.

"Geneva at this time was not a very moral city. The influence of the priests and monks had not been morally wholesome. It had even been found necessary to set a special watch against the visits of the 'religious' to its red-light district. In the Madeleine quarter every third house was a tavern. Jollification which often passed into debauchery was common" (Harkness, p. 9).

VI

Calvin saw that strict discipline was necessary to effect a reformation of Geneva in State and Church which were in these days intimately connected everywhere. His chief aim was to maintain the honour of God and of His ordinances. "Severe against himself he was thence also severe against others. With all his uncompromising opposition to popery, he had a very strong church feeling and a high view of the Divine authority of the ministerial office. He hated and abhorred an unchurchly radicalism and a licentious spirit fully as much as the opposite extreme of popery and despotism. Hence his unrelenting war against the Libertines of Geneva, or 'Spirituals', as they called themselves, who abused the liberty of the Gospel as a cloak for the licentiousness of the flesh, and threatened religion and society with anarchy and dissolution" (Schaff).

As soon as Calvin had conscientiously made up his mind to remain in Geneva, he devoted himself most earnestly to his duties, regardless of the fear and favour of man. He insisted from the start upon a rigorous discipline, without which he thought the Reformation would never succeed; and when the people were unwilling to submit to such stern rule, he in concert with his colleagues, Farel and Viret, refused to administer to them the Holy Communion. This bold step produced such an indignation, that the Protestant preachers were banished in 1538. Soon after, the people discovered their mistake and learned from

sad experience the evil effects of a wild and radical spirit upon Church and State. Then commenced the second period of his life, the time of his greatest activity and usefulness.

If " great faults " are to be assessed against Calvin, it would seem as if his connection with the case of Servetus would be the only one. But even this needs to be carefully judged. Even Dr. Harkness has felt this, and writes concerning it with restraint. She says : " It is impossible to assess with accuracy Calvin's part in this judicial murder. That he desired Servetus's death and that the welfare of the Church required it, is clear. It is equally clear that he would have preferred a milder form of execution. He took the initiative in causing Servetus's arrest and bringing him to trial, but beyond that point he had comparatively little to do with the manner in which it was conducted or with the final imposition of the sentence. The responsibility rests heavily enough upon Calvin, and it rests still more heavily upon the intolerant spirit of the age " (p. 44). We would add to this calm assessment of the case that, under the circumstances, Calvin's connection with the case cannot be classed among " great faults ", since all must admit that moral turpitude does not at all enter into the matter. At the worst Calvin was a victim of the times. Church and State were then intimately connected. And the State took cognizance of what we might call ecclesiastical sins, and punished them like regular civil crimes. To-day some balk at applying the death penalty even to a murderer. Lately we have gone a step farther, so that in some states the death penalty is also to be applied to kidnapping. In Calvin's time this extreme penalty was applied to a large number of crimes. And in those days regard for the honour of God was taken so seriously that, after the examples of the Old Testament, capital punishment was a common affair for spiritual offences. We dare affirm that they, *per se*, deserve this. Only, to-day, we are to refrain because we now understand that God has reserved the execution of this penalty to Himself. However, this was not understood in Calvin's day. And when we consider how scrupulous Calvin's regard for the honour of God was, we need not wonder that the Reformer felt bound in conscience to act accordingly. " Always willing to forgive personal injuries and insults, he flamed up in bitter wrath when the honour of the Divine Majesty was touched. And Servetus had blasphemed as no man had done before him " (Dosker). Calvin had him

arrested and brought to trial. But beyond that he had no direct hand in the matter; his request for leniency was refused, and the judges gave him to understand that the disposition of the case was *their* affair, the constituted public authorities; and Calvin was particular about recognizing the rights of the civil powers as ordained of God.

"It was only in the latter part of the eighteenth century that our present views on toleration began to take hold of the public mind. . . . Sound and consistent Protestantism must necessarily lead to an enlightened policy of toleration, to full civil and religious freedom within the limits of public order and Christian morals. But it could not reach this result at once. . . . However deeply, then, we deplore and abhor the cruel punishment of Servetus for spiritual offences, it is unjust to censure Calvin more than his age for what was inherited of the spirit and laws of medieval Catholicism; for what grew out of the close union of Church and State, and what had the express sanction of all the surviving Reformers. He was not in advance of his age in this respect, and formed no objection to the general rule. But it is nevertheless true, and placed beyond reasonable dispute, by the history of Holland, England, Scotland and the United States, that Calvin by developing the spirit of moral self-government and manly independence, has done more, directly or indirectly, for the promotion of civil and religious liberty in the world than any other sect or Church in Christendom" (Schaff).

Dr. Harkness refers to an incident relating to a certain Jean Balard, who was compelled to conform to the religious beliefs of the city, and which occurred in 1539, on which she remarks: "This incident, neither part of which occurred during Calvin's régime, clearly indicates that religious intolerance at Geneva was not of Calvin's creating" (p. 18).

VII

Calvin was unquestionably the greatest benefactor of the republic of Geneva. He not only succeeded in establishing Protestantism there on a solid moral and religious basis, but he made the city the metropolis of the Reformed Church. And all this he did in the face of innumerable difficulties, fearful

opposition that at times even endangered his life. John Knox testified of Geneva: "In my heart I could have wished, yea, and cannot cease to wish that it might please God to guide and conduct yourself to this place where I neither fear nor am ashamed to say is the most perfect school of Christ that ever was on earth since the days of the Apostles. In other places I confess Christ to be truly preached; but manners and religion to be so sincerely reformed, I have not yet seen in any other place besides." Farel wrote in 1557 that he never saw Geneva in such excellent condition before, and that he would rather be the last there than the first anywhere else. There, it was said, the pure Gospel is preached in all temples and houses (Calvin himself preaching daily every other week); there the music of psalms never ceases; there hands are folded and hearts lifted up to heaven from morning till night. "For Geneva became, towards the end of Calvin's life, a model of order, good morals and piety, and retained this high reputation for nearly two centuries" (Schaff, 130, 131). "To this might be added the equally favourable judgment of the distinguished Lutheran divine, Valentine Andreae, of the seventeenth century, who on visiting Geneva was astonished at the high degree of order and discipline which prevailed there, contrasting so strongly with the lax condition of the churches of his own creed in Germany" (Schaff, p. 138).

"In the eighteenth century the Church which Calvin founded apostatized to Socinianism and relaxed its discipline. Geneva gave birth to the pseudo-reformer, Jean Jacques Rousseau, who did as much to disorganize the morals of society, on the basis of corrupt nature, as Calvin had done to organize them on the ground of God's holy Word and Will, and who contributed more than any other writing to prepare the way for the French Revolution" (Schaff, p. 131).

VIII

Calvin's theology is criticized as being impracticable—divorced from life. Theory, intellectualism, etc., are constantly chalked up against it—always have been. But if anything is contrary to fact, it is this. Calvin was nothing if not putting things into practice. How deeply and completely he grasped

the civil, social and personal affairs of Geneva! Even the material side of civic life occupied his attention. "New sumptuary legislation was passed, some of it calculated to protect the physical as well as the moral safety of the city, such as regulations against leaving sewage and garbage on the streets, lighting fires in improper fireplaces, and unswept chimneys. Calvin's practical mind would doubtless have given much more attention to such matters, had not preoccupation with political and theological questions crowded these into the periphery" (Harkness, p. 50).

It is amusing to note the way in which Calvin sought to solve the so-called "temperance question". "Taverns were numerous in the city of Geneva and were sinks of iniquity. . . . At Calvin's instigation the Council passed an edict ordering the taverns to be closed and five 'abbayes' substituted. These abbayes were to be under the charge of respectable persons and were to sell bread and wine at cost. The regulations imposed were designed to make them quite model places! No swearing, backbiting or slandering was to be permitted; no dancing nor indecency; no singing of obscene songs. Card-playing was to be permitted if done quietly, and not for longer than one hour at a time. The Bible was to be displayed in a prominent place, and religious conversation encouraged. One must say grace over his food and drink before partaking, and return thanks afterwards. The abbayes were to close at nine o'clock. One was expected then to go home and go to bed in a sober, decent and godly frame of mind. But alas for Calvin's virtuous intentions! . . . After three months the abbayes were closed for lack of patronage, and taverns were reopened. . . . . However, the effort was not a total failure, for the agitation thus stirred up drove the worst of the taverns out of existence, and Geneva was a cleaner city for this short-lived experiment in prohibition" (Harkness, p. 28).

Had you asked the Libertines of Calvin's day whether he was a dreamy intellectualist or whether he was preaching a "social gospel", they would have said: "You folk of the twentieth century do not know what a social gospel is: Calvin has touched us in the full round of our existence and exposed us to our real selves, to the community and to God!" In all ages Calvinism has operated directly towards improvement of the

whole man, of society and the State. The Decalogue has been held in such honour that its explanation in some churches was specially insisted on. Dr. Harkness criticizes Calvin's theological system, particularly the doctrine of predestination, and failing to understand it as so many others fail to do this, gives it many a rap which is quite beside the mark and wholly gratuitous. But she can give nothing but praise to its practical piety, to its exemplification of such virtues as sobriety, frugality, industry, honesty, and the soundness of all its domestic relations. McFetridge makes the strong statement: " Let this also be remembered as a diadem upon the brow of Calvinistic morality; that in all the history of the Puritans *there is not an example of a divorce* " (p. 119).

Calvinistic industry and frugality have lately led to a criticism upon it which is rather surprising. Professor Max Weber, of Heidelberg University, in 1904 published a book with the title, *Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism.* " In this treatise Weber has pointed out the close concomitance between the growth of Calvinism and of capitalism. He maintains that the capitalistic spirit may virtually be regarded as the child of Calvinism " (Harkness, 178). We need not dwell long on this. But what a criticism on Calvin, when we remember what sort of a man he was in his financial situation and outlook! Socialism and Communism are antipodies of Calvinism, as the latter of these two particularly is rooted in atheism, and, as Groen van Prinsterer of Holland has shown in his massive and very able book on *Unbelief and Revolution*, setting forth unbelief as the life-principle of Revolution. It overthrows everything which has been held so far as necessary by mankind, namely, religion, morality, liberty, individuality, and what not. Calvinism has been ably set forth as the Guarantee of Constitutional Liberty as it also buttresses human character and furnishes a worthy aim of human existence.

IX

Not a finger could be pointed at Calvin in regard to coarse or sensual sins. The discipline of Geneva was strict in this regard, and well might it be to thwart the Libertines who had made Geneva a sink of iniquity. However, " in the midst of his

efforts to improve the morals of Geneva, Calvin was forced to the dregs of bitterness by scandal in his own family on account of the adultery of his brother's wife. Once more he was doomed to suffer similarly in the guilty conduct of his step-daughter. This blow was almost too much for him and he retired to the country for a time while the tongues of the scandal-mongers buzzed " (Harkness, 51, 52).

To make our estimate of Calvin as complete as possible we are bound to mention one real fault which characterized Calvin as so many others. " All his life long he had to contend with an irascible temper, which he himself called ' his wild animal '. Easily condoning personal insult and injury, his wrath fairly boiled over when the honour of God was at stake. He suffered under his weakness till the day of his death. In the memorable farewell address to the Council of Geneva, he said: ' I own specially that I am greatly indebted to your kindness for bearing so patiently with my often unbridled impetuosity. I hope and trust that God will also forgive me the sins, which I have thus committed.' He knew his sin, and repented of it: a sign of true greatness " (Dosker). And may we not add that this fault, so common in human nature, and there the sinful reflex of the same emotion in the Divine Being, was in Calvin's case an error on the side of earnest purpose. We do not excuse Calvin, but we believe that a high-strung temperament in one of so fine a sense of moral and spiritual proprieties could not, without a miracle, contain itself under the terrible and unintermittent provocation he met with. And it is to Calvin's great credit and lasting honour that he did not, like so many great men after him, resign in a huff. On the contrary, where is there a man who endured so much and so patiently with such single regard for remaining faithful to the call of God, as Calvin ? Well might another of his mottoes have been: " *Nil desperandum !* "

" Those who see in Calvin only unyielding sternness overlook the almost feminine gentleness he displayed in many of his parish relationships. He grieved with people in their sorrows and rejoiced in their joys. Some of his letters to those who 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 schoolboy a friendly pat and an encouraging word. He was hospitable, and entertained often, in a simple way. His enemies might call him pope or king or caliph; his friends thought of him only as their brother and beloved leader" (Harkness, p. 55). "His soul", says Bonnet, "absorbed by the tragic emotions of the struggle he maintained in Geneva by the labours of his vast propagandism abroad, rarely laid itself open, and only in brief words which are the lightnings of moral sensibility, revealing unknown depths, without showing them wholly to our view."

"Calvin's friends would have a story of real affection to tell. Think of Farel and Viret, of Bucer and Melanchthon, and especially of Beza! How pathetically tender and solicitous for their welfare his letters show him to be! He bore the burdens of their grief and rejoiced in their happiness. If anyone doubts, let him read the letter to Farel written on the occasion of the death or murder of his blind Genevan colleague, Courad. Or let him read the Introduction to the Commentary of Titus and learn how he loved Farel and Viret. How he opened the secret doors of his soul to these bosom friends in his letters! Whoever would know Calvin as a man, must read his correspondence" (Dosker).

"It has been said that he lacked 'that warmth of heart which rendered Luther so lovable'. And far be it from us to deny any of those amiable, charming, poetic qualities which the character of Luther presents us. But, speaking of the German Reformer, we must admit that he had few very intimate, loyal friends. Melanchthon himself does not appear to have lived on terms of perfect familiarity with Luther. Calvin, on the other hand, is surrounded with friends, whose affection, and harmony, were of a character at once profound, constant and far-famed. There are, to begin with, Farel and Viret, who, with Calvin, formed the famous 'tripod'. And there is Beza, whose filial affection towards Calvin was as great as his admiration for him—not to mention a group of disciples who were in very deed, his children, his sons, and to whom he really was a father."

X

"Here is another fact which is not less significant. Wherever he stayed Calvin made himself friends; yea, and such friends as were ready to quit their native land, in order to go and live in Geneva, and not only in the same town as Calvin, but in the same quarter of the town, and in the same street as Calvin. They came from Noyon, from Paris, from Orleans, from Bourges, from Poitiers. Few men have exercised such an attraction. Must he not have been lovable, to have been so much loved?" (Doumergue, EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY, January 1929, p. 73).

And if Melanchthon "does not appear to have lived on terms of perfect familiarity with Luther", it is well known that real affection existed between Calvin and Melanchthon, as their correspondence shows.

"So, too, Calvin loved his wife with an intense though unostentatious love. When she was ill, he tells Viret: 'My wife is ill, hence my thoughts are distracted.' When the prevalence of the plague caused her to leave Strasburg, he writes: 'She flits night and day before my eyes, alone, as she is comfortless and without support.' He calls her '*Singularis exempli foemina*', a unique example of a woman. We can follow the course of her chronic illness, in his letters to his friends, and when at last he lost her he writes to Viret: 'You know the tenderness, or rather the weakness of my heart, and therefore you know full well that if I had not exercised the full force of my spirit to soften my agony, I could not have borne it. And indeed the cause of my distress is not a trifling one. I am separated from the best of companions.' And seven years later, in a letter to Richard de Valleville, he still expressed that same grief" (Dosker).

This tender side revealed itself strikingly in his last days. "Like a patriarch he assembled his ministers and syndics round his dying bed, asked humbly their pardon for occasional outbreaks of violence and wrath, and affected them to tears by words of the most solemn exhortation to persevere in the pure doctrine and discipline of Christ. . . . The few remaining days Calvin spent in severe bodily pain, in constant prayer and repetition of Scripture passages such as: 'I was dumb; I

opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.' He died peacefully on May 27th, 1564, in his fifty-fifth year, in the arms of his faithful friend and successor, Theodore Beza."

"The Reformer was yet in the prime of his manhood when his body sunk under the load of such extraordinary labours. Frequent headaches, asthma, fever, gravel and other diseases were his lot. Nocturnal studies with a dim lamp suspended over his humble bed; fasting, watchful anxiety and the care of all the churches, gradually undermined his weak and emaciated frame. Even his last years were embittered by troubles. The French Reformation crushed by war, opposition at home, a city decimated by the most virulent epidemic of plague known for many years, himself tired to death and often longing for rest—such were his last days."

Calvin was not lazy nor seeking his ease. In only thirty years was produced a most prodigious amount of literary labour. Upwards of sixty volumes of his works are extant. Besides this he preached thousands of sermons which were not reported. "Beza cites a statement which should give courage to any present-day clergyman who finds his time for writing and study invaded by the requirements of parish duties. 'When the messenger called for my book, I had twenty sheets to revise, to preach, to read to the congregation, to write four letters, to attend to some controversies, and to return answers to more than ten persons who, in the midst of my labours, interrupted me for advice.'"

"His other contemporary biographer, Colladon, gives a suggestive picture of the characteristic range of his activities. 'He preached every day of each alternate week. He lectured three times each week on theology. He was on the consistory on the appointed day and spoke all the remonstrances. What he added on the conference of the Scriptures every Friday which we call the Congregation, was the equivalent of a lecture. He was not neglectful in the visitation of the sick, in special remonstrances, and in other innumerable concerns having to do with the ordinary exercise of the ministry. But besides these ordinary labours, he bore much responsibility for the faithful in France, teaching, exhorting, counselling and consoling them by letters in their persecutions, interceding for them or procuring intercession when he thought he saw some means'" (Harkness, 55, 56).

XI

Calvin was a hero of the highest type. He did his duty without flinching and persevered to the limit. Modest as he was, and even fearful of engaging in his great work, he had great strength of purpose and undaunted courage. In his closing days he testified to his colleagues: "'I have lived in marvellous combats here. I have been saluted in mockery of an evening by fifty or sixty gun-shots before my door. Fancy how that could shock a poor student, timid as I am and as I confess I have always been. After that, I was hunted from this city and betook myself to Strasburg. Having dwelt there for some time, I was recalled, but I had not less trouble than before in the discharge of my duty. They set dogs on me, and these gripped me by my coat and legs. They cried "scoundrel, scoundrel" after me. . . . Although I am nothing, I know that I have suppressed three thousand tumults in Geneva. Be strong and of good courage, for God will preserve this church and defend it. . . . I have had many faults which you have had to endure, and all that I have done is of little worth. . . . Nevertheless, if I may say so, I have intended well. My faults have always displeased me, and the root of the fear of God has been in my heart'" (Harkness, p. 58).

"Far from being boastful, he was not ashamed to recognize facts. He aimed at upholding the glory of God and he would let nothing interfere with a steady devotion to his high ideal. No wonder, then, that he was a man of principle and deep conviction. When Melanchthon was wavering and yielding in the Interim period, Calvin wrote to him: 'Vacillation in so great a man is not to be tolerated. I would a hundred times rather die with you than see you survive a doctrine which you betrayed.' He was moulded into a type of irresistible strength by life-long trials. Listen to his defiance of the Libertines: 'As long as you are here, you will have to obey the laws, and if there were as many diadems in your houses as there are heads, God will yet know how to remain Master.' And when in 1553 dangers thickened and death frowned on him on every hand, when friends were few and his power seemed broken, he said: 'They want to taste my blood, although I doubt whether they would like the taste as well as their own sins. But God lives, and this faith

encourages me. And if all Geneva conspired to kill me, I would yet cry out the word for which they so bitterly hate me—Repent!' Or think of that heroic scene in St. Peter's, when he drove the rebellious Libertines from the Lord's table. Or that other scene when he appeared in the Great Assembly and stood forth among a bloodthirsty mob eager for his life, with bared head and breast and calmed the passionate fury into sullen shame by his withering glance and irresistible address. Audin has described the incident dramatically: 'The Council assembled. Never was it more tumultuous. The parties, wearied of speaking, cried, "To arms!" The people heard the cry. Calvin arrived alone. He was received at the end of the hall with threats of death. He crossed his arms and gazed fixedly at the agitators. No one dared to strike him. Then advancing into the midst with his breast bare, he said, "If you wish blood, strike here." Not an arm moved. Calvin then slowly ascended the staircase. The hall was about to be filled with blood. Swords glittered, and at the sight of the reformer the weapons were lowered and some words sufficed to allay the excitement. Calvin, taking one of the councillors by the arm, came down from the staircase and cried to the people that he wished to speak to them. He spoke with such force and emotion that the tears ran down his cheeks and the crowd retired in silence. . . . From that point it was easy to predict that victory would rest with the reformers'" (Harkness, p. 37).

Finally, perhaps one of Calvin's "great faults" is his system of doctrine. As a matter of fact, Calvinism as a system of thought has ever come in for severe criticism. In her otherwise fine book Dr. Harkness devotes many pages to its discussion, and throughout the book constant thrusts at Calvinistic belief are in evidence. We cannot here fully enter into the matter. Suffice it to say that Calvinism reckons with the deep things of God. It finds in these many an antonomy which transcends solution by human reason. Our opponents persist in forcing conclusions from premises in which divine and human elements coalesce. Calvin humbly believed that the finite cannot hold the infinite and he submitted to this with all his soul.

After Paul and Augustine, Calvin is the third great dogmatic genius who had a comprehensive grasp upon the great verities of theology and gave them fresh exposition. At the early age of twenty-five years his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* flashed

upon the world with a brilliancy which has never faded. Calvin revised it more than once, but it never needed reconstruction. To such a man universal admiration is due. And we conclude our account as we began, once more quoting Beza's trenchant statement: "As it is easy for malevolence to calumniate his character, so the most exalted virtue will find it difficult to imitate his conduct."

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