

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

GENEVA AS IT WAS AND AS IT NOW IS.

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AND THE NINETEENTH.

Last week I paid a visit to a friend—a pastor in one of the national churches of Geneva—and naturally we had much conversation regarding the change which had come over that city since the sixteenth century, when Calvin ruled in civil and ecclesiastical affairs. To many of the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN the substance of our conversation will possess a certain interest. Voltaire writing of the

CITY OF CALVIN,

two centuries before his day, calls it a noble, rich, proud city, whose people were always calculating but never laughing, where balls and comedy were hated, and where the Psalms of David was the great source of pleasure. He speaks of the gloomy race of preachers who had imprinted sadness on the brows of all. Other writers tell how the private houses, like the churches, were stripped of all ornaments. The reformers were not allowed to wear silk or velvet. The law intervened everywhere, regulating the fashions, and fixing even the bills of fare at meals,—"two plates, meat and vegetables, without pastry." The Consistory made appear before it all who "sinned against morals." And what were some of their crimes? A woman took it into her head to pray in Latin an "Ave Maria," or "Let the souls of the faithful rest in peace." Another had worn her hair hanging, a man had appeared in public with "puffed breeches," young people had been caught in an inn, etc. Inns were permitted only to be visited by strangers, for whom the inn-keeper was made responsible. On arriving travellers were stripped of their swords, and were not allowed to go out after supper, nor to drink anything but the red wine of the country. If they failed to pray before partaking of a repast, the inn-keeper was held responsible. Girls who had the temerity to skate, were called to appear at once. A snuff-taker who, during a sermon had offered a pinch to his neighbour, a debtor and creditor who had arranged some matter of business when leaving church, a woman who had looked at the preacher with too marked attention, a peasant who had given to his cow the Scriptural name of Rebecca, etc. These are a few of the crimes selected at random from a list before me. During the sixteenth century nothing for the

GRATIFICATION OF THE TASTE

was permitted. Art and the muses were banished by the early reformers. Dancing, and even the sight of dancing, was prohibited. Music was not allowed even at nuptial feasts. Sacred music itself was suspected by Calvin. He admitted that the song of the church might serve for edification, "provided always that they took care that the ears were not more attentive to the harmony of the singing than the mind to the spiritual sense of the words." All mystery plays, all theatrical representations were strictly forbidden, as were all scenic plays, up to the eighteenth century—comedy could not be acted even in private houses. A recitation of the "Cid" in costume (which aggravated the offence) had almost caused the government and the "venerable company of pastors" to quarrel. This time, however, it was the clergy who had to submit.

THE GOVERNMENT OF GENEVA

was composed of three powers, one possessing sovereign power, the others executive only. These were the "Little Council," consisting of twenty-five magistrates, the "Council of Two Hundred" citizens, and the "Council General," made up of the "Little Council," the "Council of Two Hundred," and of all the people. There was a "Chamber of Reform" chosen from amongst the members of the "Little Council" and the "Council of Two Hundred," whose duty it was to apply the sumptuary laws, and to repress abuses of toilet and luxury. Although Geneva long continued to be attached to its ancient usages, the austere simplicity and rigour of the laws of the sixteenth century began to be relaxed towards the end of the seventeenth, and still more in the eighteenth. A proof of this is given in the report of a meeting of the

CHAMBER OF REFORM

of January, 1758. After telling how the Chamber was applying itself to prevent the introduction of new fashions, such as "furbelows and other charms" upon women's dress, and how it had repressed all "gilding," it enumerates the following propositions as having

been passed. "That they be careful to prevent the wearing on the hat, gold or silver bands—a practice some sought to renew—that they stop the habit of wearing ear-rings, false stones and steel ornaments on the part of females—that they be exact in preventing excessive expense in the case of mourning—that they prevent masters charging such high prices that people of ordinary means can no longer give an education suitable to their children—that they dismiss a new dancing master, who has set a bad example, and may influence others—that they forbid *femmes de chambre* to wear lace ruffles—that they absolutely disallow domestics from having two suits of mourning, and also draped carriages, which are coming into fashion," etc. Up to the middle of the eighteenth century

ROMAN CATHOLICS

were forbidden to dwell in Geneva. They might pass through the city, and even spend a few days in it, but not remain permanently. Towards the middle of the century the authorities began to be rather lax in their treatment of offenders, owing, it is alleged, to the writings of Voltaire, who resided in the vicinity. In 1759 there were found to be 150 Roman Catholics in the city, of whom forty were valets, and fifty domestic servants. This was regarded with fresh suspicion by the old Genevese.

JOHN CALVIN,

who obtained almost sovereign power in Geneva in all the affairs of church and state, was by birth a Frenchman, being born at Noyon, in Picardy in 1509. He had been expelled from France on account of his doctrines, and sought an asylum in Geneva, where he joined Farel in 1536, and remained here until his death, in 1564. He is described as being a thin, sickly man, the subject of "five or six maladies." Yet he preached or lectured every day to hundreds of students, and found time to read everything, to write tracts by hundreds, and letters by thousands. He was an eminent Latin scholar, and took part in all matters, in the great affairs of kings as well as the small matters of the parish. Occasionally, arming himself with a trowel, he even went and worked on the ramparts of the town. Calvin's work was stupendous. Without him the Geneva of his day would not have held out against the arms of its neighbours, and the seductions of Francis de Sales. Strengthened by his discipline the little republic became the city of an idea—the focus of a light which has shone for three centuries—a light which to day has certainly grown dim, though not wholly extinguished. All the visible objects now in this city with which Calvin had any connection are, a chair he used to sit upon, which stands behind the pulpit of the old cathedral, (St. Pierre,) and the house in which he lived, No. 11 rue des Chanoines, on the west of the cathedral. "Geneva, that astonishing asylum between three nations," says Michelet, "lasted by its

MORAL FORCE.

No territory, no army, nothing as regards space, time or materials—the city of intellect, built by stoicism upon the rock of predestination. To all people in peril, Sparta, for an army, sent a Spartan. It was thus with Geneva. To England she gave Peter Martyr to Scotland, John Knox; to the Netherlands Marx—three men, and three revolutions. If in any part of Europe there was need of blood and torture, a man to be burned or broken on the wheel, this man was at Geneva, ready and disposed, and departed, thanking God and singing psalms to Him."

There was another element in Genevan society besides that of the old reformers, which was an appreciable factor in forming the character of the people. This was the

REFUGEE ELEMENT,

which was always present, and which helped to impart an unpoetic and rather sombre hue to the population. Those who have studied church history know how ready Geneva always was to welcome to its borders those who were flying from religious persecution; as many as 1,500 French, and 300 Italians being present at the same time in the city. The tone and general bearing of this class was not likely to encourage gayety or frivolity of any kind. They were mostly men and women of serious thought, whose brows were pale with study, and whose countenances wore the sadness inseparable from exile.

THE GENEVA OF TO-DAY,

as seen from the lake, wears a look of magnificence which nearer inspection does not quite justify. Its

hotels are certainly palatial in their appearance, its boulevards pretentious, its squares, parks and gardens pleasant enough. Its position, too, favours its appearance. Built on both sides of the lake, which here contracts to the size of a large river, with beautiful bridges connecting the shores, to the tourist who enters it for the first time, Geneva does look, both by day and night, truly charming. The lake, so placid in a summer evening, extending away to the north-east as far as the eye can reach, and reflecting on its surface every passing cloud, and every tree and hill which rises on its shores, does "woo" every beholder "with its crystal face." How pleasant, too, to watch "the blue rushing of the arrowy Rhone," as it parts from "the bosom of its nursing lake," and hurries on, cleaving its way between "heights which appear as lovers who have parted," to lose itself, after a long journey, in the waters of the Mediterranean. What a contrast in colour this lovely stream presents at Geneva to that which it has as it issues, muddy and black, from the mighty glacier, which lies far away between the Fera and the Grimsel. What fine views are to be had of the Jura mountains on one side, and of Mont Blanc on the other, with the Mote and the Brezon in the foreground.

Deprived of its lake and river and of its views, the Geneva of to-day would possess but little interest to the summer visitor, who rarely cares to look beneath the outward appearance of things. Tourists are too restless, too anxious to penetrate the mountain fastnesses to give much thought to past history, or to dwell on it as the birthplace of great men, and the centre of events which have influenced the civilization of the world. In the old town, on the left bank—the Geneva of history—the streets are narrow, steep and crooked, and the houses old and dingy, and many of them inhabited by a class of people of foreign origin, some of whom have left their own countries for their country's good. Nearly half

THE POPULATION.

of the little Canton of Geneva, the smallest next to Zug, in the Confederation, are natives of France; and there are, in addition, at least 4,000 Germans, 3,000 Italians and 3,000 of other nationalities, with 18,000 Swissers from other Cantons. The Genevese are therefore a minority in their own country. It is easy to understand the effect of so large a foreign element on the morals and manners of the people. No wonder that the old inhabitants sometimes regretfully look back to the good old times of even fifty years ago, when the Genevese formed but one family, when the city was enclosed within its ancient walls; when industry and commerce flourished, when trade was conducted exclusively by Swiss merchants; when distinguished English families came in their own carriages and made long stays; when the Council of State fixed the number of *cafes* at twelve, and allowed no strangers unfurnished with passports to enter the gates; when rows were unknown, and beggars and vagabonds few and far between. But these good old times are no more; the quaint walks have disappeared, the city extending far beyond their limits; passports are no longer needed; *cafes* have increased to five or six hundred, arrivals are often more than 3,000 a day, many of them being disreputable men and women of different nationalities. One inducement to strangers to come to Geneva is the facility of marriage and divorce, one process being almost as easy as the other, owing to the laxity with which the law in this respect is administered. Or the

CLERGY

of the National Church, seven of the sixteen in the city are rationalists, and four out of the seventeen in the country parishes. Even the ministers of the Evangelical Free Church have not adhered to the doctrines on which that branch of the Church was founded. More than half the whole population is Roman Catholic. No wonder, then, if worldliness now prevails over spirituality in this the city of Calvin, and that every species of immorality is rampant, where the "Chamber of Reform" once held so tight a rein. Next to *cafe* and hotel-keeping, cigar-selling, and watchmaking, one of the most important trades in the Geneva of to-day is

BANKING,

there being as many as thirty individuals, firms and joint stock companies, who are described as bankers. In the days when every Swiss canton had its own monetary system, and every German principality its