

## CALVINISM BEFORE CALVIN.

By Calvinism we mean not a certain set of opinions but a connected system of theology, in which are found, placed in logical order, the materials drawn from the Word of God, as the great quarry of truth. In the first sense, all the inspired teachers of divine wisdom were of the same mind as the great Reformer who gave his name to the form of sound doctrine upon which our Church stands. No complete theological system, however, made its appearance in the world until the time of him whom we call the father of Calvinism, Augustine, the pious and learned Bishop of Hippo. There are few among those interested in the great names of the Kingdom of Christ who are not familiar with the history of this great father of the Church. Augustine was born 354 years after Christ in an obscure village of Northern Africa, with a heathen for his father and the pious Monica for his mother. His active mind, soon as he began his studies, mastered the pagan philosophy of the past, opened itself to the errors of a false fatalistic system called Manichæism, which rejected much of the Word of God, mingling fables with what it kept, but remained obstinately closed against the truth as it is in Jesus. His story until he became a Christian is that of his pious mother's tears and joy. None can tell it better than he himself did in his "Confessions."

"For nine years, during which I wallowed in the deep slime and death shades of error, while often I sought to rise but slid back yet deeper, did that pious, chaste and sober widow, such an one as Thou lovest, vigorous indeed in hope yet not lacking in sighs and tears, never desist from prayers, at every hour lamenting my state before Thee. And these prayers of hers came truly into Thy presence, yet sent me back till now more and more involved in thick darkness. Thou gavest her an answer by a certain bishop of Thine, nourished in Thy Church and experienced in Thy Word, who, when this woman prayed him that he should deign to speak with me, refute my false opinions, unlearn me what was evil, and teach me what was good, replied, 'Let him alone, and pray to God for him; he will yet find, in studying, what his error is and how great his impiety.' When he had said this and had not thus been able to pacify her, as she persisted beseeching him and weeping greatly, he said 'Go, it cannot be that the son of these tears should perish.' At the end of these nine years Augustine sat in a garden with his friend Alypius, his soul under deep concern from the truths proclaimed by Ambrose, the bishop whom his mother had besought to teach him. "I scolded in misery, 'How long? How long? To-morrow and to-morrow? Why not now? Why not this moment finish my sin?' So I spoke and wept bitterly with deep contrition in my heart. And lo, I heard a voice, as if of a boy or a girl, I know not, from a neighbouring house, chanting and ever repeating, 'Take up and read, take up, read!' Immediately, with changed countenance, I began intently to think whether the children, in any kind of sport, were accustomed to sing thus; nor did it occur to me that I had ever heard the like. I rose, repressing the force of my tears, for I interpreted it no otherwise than that Heaven commanded me to open the book and read what first I should find. Therefore, at once I returned to the place where sat Alypius; for there I had placed the book of the Apostle when I rose in silence. I seized it, I opened it, and read in silence the portion on which my eyes first fell. 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.' I did not desire to read further, nor was there need. Immediately, at the