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Our Contributors

BOOK
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CALVINISM AND THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.

By Professor Henry E. Dosker, D.D.

In one of these articles it was said that Luther stood with one foot in the past, with the other in the present; Calvin, on the contrary, with one foot in the present, with the other in the future. And the present, in which he moved, was still animated by that most difficult of all things fully to appreciate, the spirit of the Middle Ages. A new humanity was created, and this new humanity, dimly self-conscious, was standing as on tip-toe and gazing into the distant future. To appreciate Calvin's life and theology, we must never forget this. Says Henry: "The voice of a new life spoke within him, he existed in the season of transition to another period of culture, which he partially comprehended and partially assisted to effect. If we are conscious of some discordant notes in his life, we must not neglect to consider that after the lapse of some centuries, when the world will be animated by another spirit, history in our present mode of existence, will utter more than one discordant note, because we are more or less in bondage to the spirit of our age, which can never be absolutely pure. But the individual is not responsible for the spirit of his times."

"The twentieth century is wholly different in every aspect from the sixteenth; we have made immeasurable progress in those five centuries; the spirit of the age is wholly changed; our angle of view, from which we look at things, is not that of the fathers. And yet we should never forget that the objective reality of the things we look at, as well as they did, is not changed. When we ask the question, therefore, what significance Calvin has for our century, we may safely set aside, as unreliable, the off-hand verdict of many men, men even of great ability and wide reputation, who claim that Calvinism is hopelessly dead and beyond the possibility of resurrection.

They who pass this judgment forget in the first place that Calvinism, as we have said before, is a misnomer, theologically at least, because its main principles are vastly older than its name implies. And in the second place they overlook the principle of pendulosity in the history of Christian doctrine. In the family life of the church there are only cradles, no graves at all. For nothing that was ever born in it can actually be said to have ever died. Old things have in it a peculiar habit of renewing their youth again. Moreover, he must be a bold man, who could claim that Calvinism, even in the restricted sense, is dead today. The man who passes such a judgment has only a partial knowledge of the facts in the case. From the very beginning there were in the life of the Church two tendencies, which we may roughly outline as the Paulinic and Judaistic. On the one hand, a conception of the need of divine grace was absolute, on the other as relative; on the one hand God and man, on the other, man and God; on the one hand a humanity lost and dead in trespasses and sin, on the other, a humanity ill by reason of sin but far from helpless.

From Paul to Augustine, from Augustine to Gottschalk, from Gottschalk to Thomas Aquinas, from Thomas Aquinas to Calvin, always these two forces are in operation, in ceaseless action and reaction. The significance of Calvinism for our age is therefore what it has had and will have for all ages. But there is a wider sense, in which the word is used.

The great underlying principles of his doctrine found with Calvin a wider and deeper application. They became a distinct world-view (*Weltanschauung*) and they virtually led the stream of human life into a new channel. As Dr. Kuyper has so beautifully argued in his "Stone Lectures," Calvinism takes rank with Paganism, Islamism and Romanism, as a new process of human development. A glance at history will convince even the most skeptical, or the most hostile, of the rejuvenating influence, which it has exerted on the nations that fell under its sway. Dr. Fruin, of Leyden University (himself a rationalist), has plainly shown how in every case, where Protestantism had to assert itself by force, it was Calvinism which waged the war of victory. Our own great historians have freely admitted that the heaven of Calvinism, brought to our shores by the Puritan pilgrims, has made North America great, and differentiated it forever from South America.

And it was not the political aspect of Calvinism, not the principle of human individuality and right of man over against man, not Calvinism as "the guarantee of constitutional liberty," which wrought the miracle and achieved the success; but it was the potentiality of its inherent religious principles, which has done it all. Says Dr. Kuyper: "It could not have brought about this change in the history of the world, except by implanting a new principle in the human heart and by opening another world of thought for the human spirit." And again: "From Western Europe the mighty impulse proceeded which caused science and art to flourish, which opened new channels for commerce and industry, which illumined family and civic life, which elevated the burgher class to a position of honor, which placed the laborer with equal rights by the side of the employer, which caused philanthropy to bloom and above all which, by its puritanical seriousness, has elevated the moral life of humanity and purified and ennobled it. Then judge whether we have the right to continue to banish this God-given Calvinism to the historical archives, as a drama that has been finished; and whether it is so inconceivable that this same Calvinism might again bring us a blessing and might unfold within itself a beautiful hope for the future."

It is true these words bring no thrill to the man, who bows before the idol of the day and who is convinced that the vaunted biblical scholarship of the age has given a death-blow to historical Calvinism. The sovereignty of God is not a palatable doctrine to the man who glories in his own sovereign power. The Scriptures, lacerated by the dissecting knife of the critics, seem worn to a frazzle and have apparently lost that hold on the human consciousness, without which Calvinism is inconceivable. Christ has been humbled to the dust and even his true historic picture is no longer sought in but behind the gospel story, by the great German scholars. Divine no longer, He is merely a noble example of disinterested love and piety. Gone are His incarnation, His miracles, His atoning death, His resurrection, His ascension. Looked at with the eye of the scholarship of the age, our entire Apostolic Creed looks like the water front of Messina after the earthquake.

What then has Calvin to hope for from such an environment? But wait! All these negations occupy the attention of the world of scholarship, the masses of

believers still cling to the old faith, to the "old-time religion." I dare say this is equally true of the great mass of Presbyterians of what ever name, clergy, and laity alike. The great underlying principles of Calvinism have not lost their hold on the masses of the people. Why the almost hysterical demand for civic righteousness in our own country, North and South, East and West? Why the universal cry for evangelistic efforts? Why the lining up of our men for the help of the Lord against the mighty? Why the universal unrest, the craving for closer communion with God, voiced in every direction?

What we need is knowledge and leadership, the plain and unequivocal restatement of the old principles, perhaps in terms more intelligible to our generation, which have made our Presbyterian churches a power for God in the land. That this is not an idle dream is proved by the history of Dutch Calvinism, once spued out and despised, trampled under foot by Rationalism and apparently forgotten; but rising like a Phoenix from its ashes and, under able leadership, dominating today both the political and the ecclesiastical situation.

What we need in our Calvin—celebration is deep conviction and high and holy resolve. We will then find that the principles, on which our Presbyterian life is founded, are unchangeably the same for all time and that in honoring the man, whose fourth centenary we celebrate, we are only laying stress on that, which was the centre and circumference of all Calvin's labors the Glory of God.—Presbyterian Standard.

HOW TO INCREASE THE INTEREST IN MISSIONS.

(Mrs. George Begg, Austin, Texas).

There can be no question as to whether a church shall be a missionary church. If it is not a missionary church it is not a true church of Christ. There should never be a question as to whether a Christian should be in favor of missions; if he is not in favor of missions either he does not know enough to be a Christian "four square," or else he is not willing to be one. A person who opposes missions sets himself against Jesus; and he cannot be for Him and against Him.

Missions is the main business of the church, just as selling goods is the main business of the shop-keeper. What would we think of a shop-keeper who would fit up a handsome shop and hire a set of capable clerks and then take no thought about the sale of his goods? That would be no worse than to build fine churches and have fine singing and preaching, and take no thought for the salvation of the world. When the church ceases to be missionary she will cease to live, because she was created for that end and must keep the trust.

There are three great foes to missions—worldliness, selfishness, and ignorance. The first two can only be overcome by prayer and example. Any plan that will secure more generally throughout our churches earnest, definite, and intelligent intercession, ought to be regarded as important.

It is a duty and privilege always within reach of every Christian, and was a characteristic work of our Saviour and His apostles when on earth.

The ladies of our church hold a prayer meeting every Monday afternoon, and last year we agreed to pray that five workers for the field should be called from our church, and each week