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ANNIVERSARIES IN GENEVA, 1959

IN THE COURSE of the past few months the city of Geneva celebrated three notable anniversaries. They all recalled significant events of the sixteenth century. They all commanded international attention. They all paid tribute to the memory of John Calvin.

I

The first was the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Calvin's birth in Noyon, France, on the tenth day of July, 1509. He was the fourth son of Gerard Chauvin (or Cauvin), a notary of that city, and his wife Jeanne Lafranc. He was baptized Jean, perhaps because it was the masculine equivalent of his mother's Christian name. When he entered the University of Paris, at the tender age of fourteen years, he was registered as Joannes Calvinus. It is from this Latin rendering of his surname that the familiar French and English form *Calvin* derives.

There is no need in the present context to provide even a brief biography of Calvin, but some account of the circumstances that gave Geneva its claim on him is obviously in order. In his twenty-eighth year he was still identifying himself as John Calvin of Noyon, although he no longer regarded Noyon as his home. His connection with the little city of twelve or thirteen thousand souls on the shore of Lake Léman commenced at that point in his life, as the result of an accident of transportation that he himself regarded in retrospect as an act of Divine Providence.

French religious exiles who wished to return home in 1536 were offered temporary immunity from prosecution, and Calvin took advantage of the chance to revisit Paris. After a short stay, during which he arranged for the disbursement of his father's estate, he set out for Strasbourg where he would be safely beyond the reach of French law. The direct route through Lorraine happened at that time to be closed because of a fresh outbreak of military activities, and he was forced to make a detour that led through Geneva. This inconvenience had far-reaching consequences for Calvin personally, and through him for Europe, and, finally for the

New World that was still a wilderness—Columbus had discovered it only forty-four years before.

When he reached Geneva, Calvin took a room in an inn, planning to stay for a single night and to resume his journey next day. Word of his arrival was speedily conveyed to Guillaume Farel, minister of the Reformed Church, by Louis de Tillet, a mutual friend who had in some manner learned of his presence in the city. Farel, a Frenchman like Calvin himself, immediately called on Calvin and importuned him to remain and assist him in the tremendous task that he had undertaken. Calvin promptly rejected the proposal and gave several reasons why he could not entertain it. He said that he was by nature faint-hearted and timid and therefore unsuited for the work; further, his health was far from good (he was never a robust man), and at the moment he was in urgent need of rest; finally, his present interest was to find a quiet spot where he could devote his undistracted attention to his studies in order to improve his understanding of the Christian faith, so that after he had mastered his subject sufficiently he could serve it best by his pen. These objections, as he realized later, were in part at least a rationalization of his desire for "the enjoyment of literary ease, with something of a free and honourable station". Farel, who had faced mobs as the champion of his convictions and had no patience with men who tried to excuse themselves from the ordeal of conflict, disliked Calvin's attitude and frankly told him so. "You are concerned about your rest and your own personal interest" he shouted. "Therefore let God damn your rest, let God damn your work".

This passionate assault overwhelmed Calvin's resistance, and at the end of the visit he promised to return to Geneva, which he did within a few weeks. In September, Farel made a favourable report to the Council on the instructive lectures that Calvin had inaugurated in the Church of St. Pierre, and asked the city to retain his services. The Council acceded to the request in what appears to have been a perfunctory fashion. It appointed Calvin, but made no provision for his stipend, an omission to which Farel found it necessary to call the attention of the members six months later. Calvin was referred to in the Council's resolution simply as "the man from France (*ille Gallus*)": apparently the secretary either did not know his proper name or did not consider it important. He was designated Professor of Sacred Literature; he was not yet given regular pastoral rank. Thus began Calvin's connection with Geneva.

Farel and Calvin took their responsibilities very seriously. They were not content with a merely nominal reformation that did not radically affect the daily lives of the people; and many of the Genevese, including some members of the most prominent families, had little sympathy with their programme. Their opponents did

their utmost to render the situation as uncomfortable as possible for them, even going to the extent of discharging fire-arms outside Calvin's door to make him believe that his life was in danger. Children shouted scurrilous epithets after him as he walked along the street, and some families are known to have named their dogs after him. At last even the members of the Council took offence at the refusal of Farel and Calvin to accept their dictation in certain matters that were clearly internal to the life of the Church, and banished them both, giving them seventy-two hours to leave the city. Calvin's first ministry in Geneva had lasted only twenty months and had ended ignominiously.

Three years later the Council, now composed of men who were convinced that the city had done itself a grave injury in driving Calvin away, implored him repeatedly to come back. The prospect had little attraction for him; his memories of Geneva were far from pleasant; but some of his friends, including Farel in particular, and several of the Swiss cities, urged him to give this Call his favourable consideration. After a delay of almost three months, he agreed to accept it, as a matter of duty. "Were I free to choose", he said, "I would do anything in the world rather than return to Geneva. But I know that I am not my own master. I offer my heart in sacrifice to God". He therefore reported for work in Geneva early in September, 1541, without eagerness or confidence. He was, however, welcomed back with manifest enthusiasm. The Council provided him with a commodious house, covenanted to pay him twice the salary allowed other ministers so that he could entertain foreign visitors, made him a gift of wine, and as a mark of special honour presented him with a new coat.

His second period of ministry in Geneva, which began under such promising auspices and continued throughout the rest of his life, was by no means always smooth sailing. His adversaries were active, and at one time it looked as if he might once more be ordered to leave town. In fact, it took more than a decade for him to come fully into his own, but after that the public deference that was paid to him was quite extraordinary. And he identified himself so completely with the life of his adopted city that he was often referred to abroad simply as "the man of Geneva".

On Christmas day, 1559, the Council took formal cognizance of the fact that although he enjoyed unequalled prestige in the city, he had never formally become a citizen. As a matter of fact, when Geneva had pressed him to return in 1541, the authorities of Strasbourg, where he then lived, had done everything in their power to dissuade him from leaving; and when it was at last clear that he had irrevocably made up his mind to go, they had prevailed upon him to retain his Strasbourg citizenship in the hope that he might eventually be disposed to come back. He had

however, remained in Geneva, and although he had served the city with distinction for the intervening eighteen years and brought it world renown, officially he was still an outsider. The Council felt that this situation was anomalous and took the unusual step of tendering him the status for which he had never asked. He was deeply moved by this gesture and graciously accepted the preferred honour. On his way home that day he had a hemorrhage, for although he had not suspected it he was suffering from tuberculosis. For the years that were left to him his iron will and his selfless devotion forced his weakening body to do its work, until he passed away on the seventeenth day of May, 1564. "Thus it happened", wrote Theodore de Bèze (Beza), his colleague, successor, and biographer, "that at the same moment, the sun was setting and the great light of the Church of God was taken heavenward. It pleased God to show us in the light of a single man of our time how to live and how to die".

Calvin was a controversial figure in his lifetime, and he has continued to be so ever since. Some men regard him with profound reverence, and some with implacable aversion. His admirers admit his faults, and his enemies emphasize them; but he must be given credit for having anticipated them both, and in his death-bed charge to his colleagues he spoke, as he had often done before, about the unhappiness that he felt when he reflected on his sins.

Certain men who might have been expected to condemn him have recognized his greatness. On receipt of the news of his death, Pope Pius IV, for example, is reported to have said "If I had such servants my dominion would extend from sea to sea"; and he remarked further that "money never had the slightest charm for him"—a judgment supported by the fact that Calvin left an estate of less than two hundred dollars. Much later, Ernest Renan pronounced him to have been "the most Christian man of his century". Sometimes people who had little sympathy with the doctrines that he taught were nevertheless impressed with the service that he rendered. Mark Pattison, for instance, writing in 1858, in anticipation of the three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Calvin's birth, had many hard things to say about both Calvin and his doctrines, but he expressed the categorical judgment that "Calvinism saved Europe". Calvinists of all shades of opinion have found ample grounds for reaffirming their appreciation of Calvin without trying to make a paragon of him. The late Professor Allan Menzies of the University of St. Andrews (d. 1916) described him as "a great scholar, who was also a genius in religion and a true friend of mankind"; and in the present decade, another Scot, Professor A. M. Hunter of Edinburgh, has concluded that few men have "stamped their name upon the world" as Calvin has done.

Newspapers in Canada and elsewhere carried photographs of the crowd assembled in Geneva last June to do honour to the memory of Calvin on the four hundred and fiftieth anniversary of his birth. In view of his relations with Geneva it was eminently suitable that the service should have been held there. The programme, according to press reports, included a pilgrimage to Noyon. The house in which Calvin was born was destroyed in the First World War, but a French Calvinistic society erected a museum and a library on the site. There will never be a pilgrimage to the place of his interment, for he was buried at his own request in an unmarked grave.

II

The second event that was commemorated in Geneva this year was the publication of the definitive Latin edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in that city four hundred years ago. If books, as Milton said, "preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them", Calvin being dead will continue to speak to the world as long as the influence of his *Institutes* remains. His own judgment was that "it holds the principal and by far the most important place among all my lucubrations", and his ablest interpreters agree with that judgment. There was, of course, a great deal more in the forty-eight volumes of his writings than he could compress into this single work, but it does present his system of theology in clear and comprehensive outline.

The *Institutes* in its genesis was an attempt to provide people who professed the Reformed Faith with what they might regard as an authoritative statement of Christian doctrine. As Calvin himself described the *Institutes* in a later edition, it was "a summary of piety and what is needful to know of the doctrine of salvation". He also tells in his famous letter to the King of France, which will be referred to later, why he felt constrained to write it. "My sole intention", he says, "was to give some instruction to those who long to be children of God, primarily among my own fellow countrymen. For I saw many in France hunger and thirst after Christ, yet few who received true instruction about Him". The book consisted of only six chapters, on the Decalogue, the Apostles' Creed, prayer, the True Sacraments, the False Sacraments, and Christian liberty, respectively. The efforts that have been made to determine when and where Calvin commenced the actual composition of it have not yielded any firm results. The renewal of religious persecution in France in 1534-35 convinced him that he should wait no longer before publishing his book, for it was needed both as a popular manual of Reformed theology and as a defence against the current misrepresentation of the evangelical position.

The real attitude of Francis I, King of France, to the Reformation had never been quite clear to anyone. He supported the movement abroad but not at home. He was on intimate terms with representatives of the Pope, yet he wanted Melanchthon, Luther's closest associate, to come to France. At one time he intervened to save the life of certain heretics who were being prosecuted at the instigation of the Sorbonne, and at another he declared that nothing in the world was closer to his heart than the "extirpation of heresy". However, the ill-conceived affair of the "placards" provoked his flaming anger and made him the mortal enemy of all advocates of church reform in France. On the night of October 17, 1534, placards ridiculing the Mass were displayed on buildings in Paris and elsewhere, and someone had even contrived to place one of the papers in the cup in which the royal handkerchief was kept. Antoine Marcourt—who was allegedly the leader in the business—escaped, for we hear of him afterwards in Geneva; but a large number of people were imprisoned. Within a few weeks thirty of them were burned at the stake in slow fires (*à petit feu*). One of the victims, it may be mentioned, was Etienne de la Forge (executed, February 13, 1535), a man of deep piety for whom Calvin had the highest regard; Calvin had lived at his home, the House of the Pelican, during part of his stay in Paris.

Francis realized that his frightful policy might have serious repercussions, especially among the German princes whose goodwill he studiously cultivated; so he sent them a memorandum explaining that the people against whom he had taken drastic action were really seditionists, and that he had dealt summarily with them because he was convinced that their ultimate objective was the destruction of the state. Calvin, who was then living in Basel, was infuriated by the King's statement and decided to lose no time in publishing his book not only as a catechism for his co-religionists in France but now also as a declaration of the faith by which they lived for the information of the world at large. He prefaced it with an open letter to the King dated August 1, 1535. There is no indication that the King ever took the trouble to read it; but, what is more important, thousands of ordinary people did. As a manual of popular theology it succeeded beyond the author's most sanguine expectations.

After Calvin's expulsion from Geneva in 1538, as already mentioned, he settled in Strasbourg. There he simultaneously kept boarders, ministered to the French refugee congregation, lectured in the Academy, and for some reason became a member of the Tailors' Guild. In the midst of his various duties he found time to publish a commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, to write a conciliatory book on the Lord's Supper (which was a subject of disagreement between Luther and Zwingli,

the Zurich Reformer), and to revise, reorganize, and greatly enlarge the *Institutes*. He published the *Institutes*, inevitably, in Latin, the language of learning. He proceeded at once, however, to translate it into French and produced a classic. As T. H. L. Parker remarks in his excellent little book, *Portrait of Calvin*, "Calvin must share the honour of being 'the father of French prose' with a very different writer, Rabelais (whom he liked not at all). It is chiefly upon the 1541 translation of the *Institutes* that the title rests: 'this translation is one of the *chefs-d'oeuvre* of the sixteenth century: it created an epoch', says a French literary historian".

Calvin was a perfectionist and, not yet satisfied with the *Institutes*, he continued to enlarge it, and in Geneva in 1559 he gave it to the world in the final Latin translation whose publication is recalled this year. The little catechism of six chapters, produced to meet the emergent need in France in 1536, had grown into a mighty tome of eighty chapters, worthy to be mentioned along with Augustine's *City of God* and Thomas Aquinas' *Summa* as one of the supreme works in the field of Christian theology. "Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*," says Professor John T. McNeill, one of the leading Church historians of the present day, "is one of the few books that have profoundly affected the course of history".

The *Institutes* was written with extraordinary knowledge of the Bible and the Christian Fathers, with the acumen of a powerful, legally trained mind, and in the best literary style of the Renaissance. It is dominated in its exposition by the author's faith in the sovereignty of God, of which religion can never become unconscious with impunity. Biblical scholarship, however, has made great advances since Calvin's time, and has invalidated some of his assumptions. To recognize this is not to detract from the glory of the *Institutes* or to be ungrateful for the service that it has rendered. The teaching of Calvin, of which the *Institutes* contains the quintessence, "was able," said J. A. Froude in an address to the students at St. Andrews in 1871, "to inspire and sustain the bravest efforts ever made by man to break the yoke of unjust authority". He continued, in a paragraph that is worth quoting at length:

> When all else has failed—when patriotism has covered its face and human courage has broken down—when intellect has yielded, as Gibbon says, "with a smile or a sigh," content to philosophise in the closet, and abroad worship with the vulgar—when emotion and sentiment and tender imaginative piety have become the handmaids of superstition, and have dreamt themselves into forgetfulness that there is any difference between lies and truth—the slavish form of belief [a reference to a derisive description of Calvinism] called Calvinism, in one or other of its many forms, has borne ever an inflexible front to illusion and mendacity, and has preferred rather to be ground to powder like flint than to bend before violence, or melt under enervating temptation.

When the calendar calls to mind the publication of the great book of Calvinism, it is salutary to reflect on the strength of character and loftiness of purpose that its creed has produced.

III

The third event that was commemorated this year was the founding of the University of Geneva, or more accurately the Academy that developed into the University, in 1559. (It was also a "college" in the accepted French sense.) There are obvious reasons why this anniversary should have called for special celebrations. For one thing, four hundred years is a respectable age for any institution to have attained; and for another, a famous centre of learning is one of the finest adornments that any city can boast. On both grounds Geneva has done well to observe the quater-centenary of its University in an appropriate manner.

It is by no means surprising that Calvin should have given thought to the provision of facilities for higher education in Geneva. He was himself not only a well-educated man—one of his ardent admirers, with pardonable exaggeration, called him the most learned man of his age—but he was also a university graduate, having obtained the degrees of Master of Arts from Paris and Doctor of Law from Orleans, the leading law school in France. He was never happier than when he was in the company of scholars: indeed, the number of eminent scholars that Calvin as a young man could count among his intimate friends is altogether remarkable. When he was in his early twenties he published an annotated edition of Seneca's *De Clementia,* and in it he quoted from fifty-six Latin and twenty-two Greek writers. He participated with one of the most famous of all French school-masters, Maturin Cordier, better known as Corderius, in the formulation of a plan for Christian education that would embrace France and Switzerland; and he was so closely identified with Nicholas Cop, when the latter brought down on his head the wrath of the authorities in Paris by the evangelical tone of his Rectorial Address in 1533, that the prosecution was directed against them both. As a matter of fact, it has been seriously maintained that Calvin prepared the address for Cop's delivery, but the argument in support of that view is now regarded as unconvincing, especially since Cop was quite capable of preparing his own address without assistance. During Calvin's stay in Strasbourg he lectured three times a week in John Sturm's Academy, which was one of the most celebrated schools of the time. He never wavered in his devotion to the cause of education. He regarded the school, with the Church and the hospital, as an indispensable public institution.

Calvin's influence is almost certainly apparent in the formal statement by the Council of Geneva in 1557 that learning is "a public necessity to secure good political

administration, sustain the Church unharmed, and maintain humanity among men." Credit must be given to Farel, his senior colleague, for having persuaded the Council before Calvin's arrival to accept the principle of compulsory and free education for all children of the community. Education was therefore an interest that Farel and Calvin shared, but Calvin alone was in Geneva in 1541 when the Council recognized the need of a college "to raise up seed for time to come in order not to leave the Church a desert to our children", and "to prepare youth for the ministry and civil government". The motives that prompted Calvin and his associates to provide full educational facilities in Geneva were remarkably like those of the pioneers in New England who founded Harvard because they "dreaded to leave an illiterate Ministry to the churches when our present Ministers shall lie in the dust", and Yale because young men should be prepared "for public employment, both in Church and State".

For many years circumstances in Geneva prevented Calvin from giving immediate effect to the resolution of 1541, but in 1557 he made up his mind that the time for action had come and seized the first opportunity to have the Council appoint a Committee to select a site for an academy. As a matter of fact, Calvin had taken time by the forelock. He had a recommendation ready, and the committee accepted it, for a plot "on elevated ground, well aired from all sides and especially exposed to the east wind so that the place may even be more healthy, gay and pleasing to the students." The project for which, he wrote, he had "the greatest longing" was at last under way.

The Academy was not like the medieval universities, with all their rights, privileges, and distinguishing marks. It was a city college made possible mainly by private gifts. Calvin promoted the undertaking with such vigour that the secretary of the Council recorded the fact that "the enthusiasm of the magistrates and the people rose above their poverty." From the printer Mathieu de la Roche, who endowed it with a quarter of his fortune, down to Jenon, the baker's wife, who contributed five sols, everyone gladly assessed himself for it. François Bonnivard, "the prisoner of Chillon" who had once occupied number nine Canon Street (*Rue des Chanoines*, now appropriately re-named *Rue de Calvin*) but moved to a new address some years before Calvin came to live in number eleven, left it his entire estate.

Calvin himself wrote the statutes of the Academy, in which he specified that the Head should be a man of learning, piety, and "un esprit debonnaire". It is a safe guess that he chose the text from Psalm CXI that was inscribed over the doorway: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." He also accepted responsibility for recruiting the teaching staff, a task that was made relatively easy for him by the migration at the time of a number of excellent scholars from Lausanne to

Geneva, in protest against civil interference in church affairs. (It will be recalled that a similar migration from Oxford in the thirteenth century gave Cambridge an impetus that it never lost.) Calvin was so engrossed in the erection of the building for the Academy that, ill though he was, he visited the site almost daily while the work was going on, to keep in touch with the progress of construction.

An inaugural service, presided over by Calvin, was held in the Church of St. Pierre on June 5, 1559. The Council declared a public holiday to mark the occasion. The people were convinced that this was a truly memorable day in the city's history. The academy opened its doors with a registration of about eight hundred students, which soon increased to about fifteen hundred. Professor G. R. Fisher, in his history of the Reformation, calls the founding of the Academy "the crown of Calvin's work in Geneva".

The Academy operated at two academic levels. At the lower, it functioned as a secondary school, and was called the *schola privata*. The curriculum was heavily weighted with the classics, and careful attention was paid to rhetoric and logic. In Geneva the proper use of the vernacular was emphasized, whereas at Sturm's school in Strasbourg and elsewhere on the Continent and in England boys were permitted to converse only in Latin. One of the less arduous exercises of the Geneva students was the singing of the Psalms in French, a new departure to which a period was devoted every day. At the higher level, the Academy corresponded more nearly to the present-day university and was called the *schola publica*. It was designed for the minority of students who had the ability and intention to go on to more advanced study. Initially, the two major faculties in the *schola publica* were philosophy and theology; the others were developed later. But the preparation of men for the Christian ministry was always Calvin's chief personal interest. (Medicine is the largest professional faculty in the University of Geneva today.)

Emmanuel Stickelberger, the Swiss writer, has recently revived interest in the fact that the Jesuits admired and emulated Calvin's program of education. He quoted Kampschulte, the Roman Catholic biographer of Calvin who was not disposed to give him the credit of the doubt when any credit was to be bestowed, as saying that Aquaviva, the general of the Jesuit order, borrowed freely from "the conception and the treatment of academic affairs" that Calvin had devised for his Academy. "In regard to the organization proper and in fundamental principle", said Kampschulte, "the two institutions are much alike, so that they are related to each other as the blue-print and the completed work." The author of the article on universities in the Americanized *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1907) says that the Jesuits adopted the "method of teaching" employed in Sturm's Academy at

Strasbourg, but does not refer to Geneva at all. The Jesuits actually made a survey of a number of schools before formulating their *ratio studiorum*, and incorporated in it ideas from various sources, among which Sturm's famous centre undoubtedly deserves specific mention. It is relevant to recall that Calvin himself was once a lecturer in Sturm's school, and that he paid a visit to it before completing his own plans for Geneva; so resemblances between Calvin's Academy and Sturm's are naturally discoverable. It is not unreasonable, however, in all the circumstances, to accept the testimony of Kampschulte regarding the immediate influence of Geneva on the Jesuits' final educational scheme. This has been noted, incidentally, by a number of eminent writers on the history of education.

It was only to be expected that Calvinism would profoundly affect education in countries where it prevailed, and this has actually been the case. It did not often result in institutions that reproduced the distinctive external features of the college that Calvin created in Geneva, but in one celebrated instance, at least, it did so. Although the founders of Edinburgh University, in 1583, never actually said that they were taking Geneva as their model, they certainly thought of the school that they were creating as "the town's college," like the college of Geneva, rather than like the universities of St. Andrew's, Glasgow, and Aberdeen, the older foundations of Scotland itself. According to Sir Alexander Grant in *The Story of the University of Edinburgh* (1883), Geneva "set an example of confounding the functions and titles of a university with those proper to a college" (p. 178), and Edinburgh followed it. The similarities between the two institutions are far too striking to be merely accidental.

To trace the influence of Geneva one step further, when the Right Honourable George Ramsay, ninth Earl of Dalhousie, was Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Nova Scotia in 1820, he laid the cornerstone of the first building of the college that was eventually to bear his name and become Dalhousie University. He said, "This College of Halifax is founded for the instruction of youth in the higher Classics and in all Philosophical studies. *It is formed in imitation of the University of Edinburgh*." So the conception that Calvin embodied in the Academy of Geneva and that was copied by the founding fathers of Edinburgh, was transplanted into Canadian life.