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CALVIN MEDAL BY SEBASTIAN DADLER (1619-53)

## CALVIN AS A THEOLOGIAN

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CALVIN is the greatest of Protestant theologians. Protestantism has moved away from him, but it has not matched him. Of course no such opportunity has recurred. In his time Europe had just waked up religiously as well as intellectually. He had the opportunity to guide the most aggressive wing of the new religious movement. He was fitted to do it by unusual gifts of mind developed under an education of breadth and variety. He had the training of a priest, of a classicist, and of a jurist, all three, and of all three combined his system of theology is the product. But the man who received this varied training was himself phenomenal—a man of enormous powers, early matured.

A large part of his effectiveness was due to clearness of thought and style, and this, again, was due partly to the French in him, and partly to his schooling in dialectic and in the classic literature. But his clearness was important because he had weighty things to say, and on these, his substantial thoughts, his priestly education had its strong influence; for it meant the early grounding of him in all the philosophy and theology which the Middle Ages were handing over—not without modification,

by the way—to the advancing Renaissance. His legal education also played its part here, emphasizing for him the ideas of authority and sovereignty, and giving to his logic an air of relentlessness.

Nor was it only in his style that his classical training appeared. This training was unusually thorough. It did not quite make a humanist of him,—his ethical sense was too dominant for repose in any artistic culture,—but it gave him strength and skill in a great field which had been nearly untilled for centuries—the field of Biblical interpretation. The classics taught him philology, and threw him back on the real meaning and usage of words. The words themselves, and the grammar of their use in sentences, became his key to interpretation. It sounds commonplace now, but then it was a difficult novelty. The Bible had sacred meanings, mysterious, symbolic, above the laws of human composition. What imagination could find in it was evolved from it. This view was strongly entrenched in mental habit, and sanctified by the associations of faith. It was hard to uproot. If intelligent people now approach the Bible with confidence in human language as a vehicle for real fact

and opinion, and seek its meaning primarily by the laws of human literature, it is very largely because of Calvin's great exegetical reform, his endeavor to learn exactly what the Scriptures say; the postulate being that in the Scriptures, under whatever high direction, men wrote for men, and used the common medium of human exchange at its standard value. It was an enormous advance, in the sixteenth century, to announce this principle and hold to it. We owe Calvin deep gratitude for it. It is true that the working of it was somewhat hampered in him by certain prepossessions. He recognized imperfectly the progress of truth in the Bible. The need of historical interpretation he perceived only in part. Yet he used the Bible with a sanity and a frankness not always equaled by his followers and pupils. He acknowledged occasional mistakes in it. God spoke in it, but the medium was the human mind and human speech. Little inaccuracies in the medium did not trouble him. Nor was the authority of the Scriptures due to ecclesiastics, or the declaration of any men at all. The Scriptures evidenced their own truth, being attested by the Spirit of God in the hearts of men. This was a bold and noble teaching.

He is better known, though in general superficially enough, by his doctrine and his discipline. His discipline was severe, when he had his way, as he did in Geneva for a time. That such a censorship of morals is a safe power for churchmen to exercise, few Protestants will now be found to believe. But he came honestly by the notion, and his own sensitive conscience and rigid habit of mental self-castigation sharpened the application of it. It expressed his own moral energy. It called attention to the truth that men are bidden not only to be right in what they think, but also to be right in what they do, and it set a lofty moral standard. In days of laxity it is easy to exaggerate moral strenuousness, whether you hate it or long for it; but at least we can see what the Puritans owed to Calvin in their ethical ideal, and the power of the ethical over modern life is of straight descent from him.

The man appears at his biggest in his exposition of the connected Christian doctrines. The "Institutio Christianæ Religionis" gave him his grip on the Protestant world. It became the great Con-

stitution of Protestantism, especially in France and Switzerland, Holland, Scotland, England, and New England. It not only gave Protestantism intellectual standing—which would not explain its power in the churches—but it lent articulate voice to the principles of the Reformation, and expressed with admirable felicity and in the closest concatenation the underlying Protestant beliefs. Others attempted this, but no one did it so well. More than this, even, it was an expression, in systematic form, of the processes of a real religious life. It banished human intermediaries and brought men face to face with God, and it justified to the reason this satisfaction of the religious nature. God supreme, and man responsible to God directly and to God only, and each man's life a plan of God—it was a great tonic for those who received it. Human dignity, with political and social freedom, followed everywhere in the track of Calvinism. The power exerted by this system has been immensely for the uplift of mankind, and when it is compared with the product of the thousand years that preceded it, it is seen to be a stride forward, side by side with Luther's, as great as that taken by the Hebrew prophets twelve hundred years earlier still.

It will not do to belittle Calvin's own religion. His religious life was deep and controlling, and religious needs were met by his theology. Men were not aware of its defects, because they shared his general point of view. The reason why the thoughtful cannot now easily accept his dogmas is that the general point of view has changed. Philosophical conceptions have altered. The whole scholastic background has disappeared. The "Novum Organum," the "Critique of Pure Reason," and the "Origin of Species," with all their sequel, have revolutionized the method of approach to truth. Religion, in particular, voices itself otherwise. The demands of feeling are more insistent. Social factors claim new emphasis. The rights of experience, and the call to life, are matched against the claims of metaphysics and of deductive logic, and are proving the stronger.

There are yet no indications of a thorough system of theology which will endure longer than Calvin's has endured. It is not likely that our complex and re-

flective nature will abolish metaphysics forever, or permanently dismiss the syllogism. The constructions of Calvin and Augustine—his great Catholic prototype—may yet have greater influence on the later formulations than would be granted them to-day. But we shall never again be able to stand where those men stood, and see all things from their angle. Intervening thought and experience can never be as if they had not been. Calvin had escaped from the medieval prison-house, but the shadows hung about him. He was no scholastic, yet the processes of formal logic still dominated him.

One could imagine him making great use of the inductive principle, for he had the capacities of a pioneer; Bacon, however, was only three years old when Calvin died. There was as yet no theory of knowledge that could modify the *a priori* habit. There was nothing to restrain Calvin from beginning with the great postulate of majestic omnipotence, losing himself in awe unutterable, and deriving all things from the sheer will of God, behind which one need not, and could not, go. Hence divine sovereignty and predestination, and

their train, as the master thoughts of his system. "De Cognitione Dei Creatoris" is the title of his first book, and "De Cognitione Dei Redemptoris" comes in the second place, and only in the third place "De Modo Percipiendæ Christi Gratia." The logic is irrefragable, but this is not the order of the religious life, and only the order of life will give us the right relations of things. Calvin's theology did not do justice to his own personal religion. The simple fact that Christianity is the religion of Christ was hid from the medieval mind. It was veiled even for Calvin himself. As it dawns upon men more fully, it transforms the character of God and the possibilities of man, and the purposes of life.

Calvin is the theologian of the past rather than of the present and the future, not because his affirmations are not profound, for they are; not because they are not true, for many more of them are true than the fashion of the day will confess: but because the whole system needs rearrangement, and in the rearrangement every doctrine needs to be stated afresh, adjusted to its new place, expressed in a new vocabulary, and filled with vital warmth and light.



## OUR REPRESENTATIVE IN LONDON

IS MONEY ESSENTIAL TO THE SUCCESS OF  
AN AMERICAN AMBASSADOR?

BY E. S. NADAL

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IT is sometimes assumed that the man appointed as our ambassador in London should be rich. It may be well to examine the correctness of this vague assumption. The money supposed to be requisite would of course be used in giving parties, balls, and dinners. The people asked would be either Americans or the English and the diplomats. Of Americans, there are perhaps at one time in London during the season as many as twenty or thirty thousand. Nearly all of these think them-

selves, and no doubt are, as good as anybody. A young woman of a good New York family once told me that she and her friends were entitled to special consideration from American diplomats. I could not see why. Of course she and her friends were in the best position in New York; but how about the best people in a thousand other cities, towns, and villages throughout the country, all of whom pay their share in the expense of maintaining our diplomacy? And, then, according