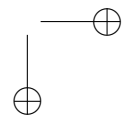
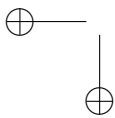
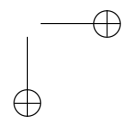
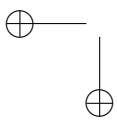
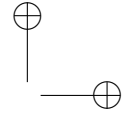
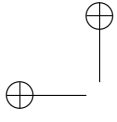
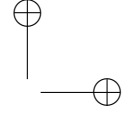
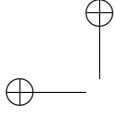


The Right to Heresy
Castellio against Calvin



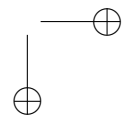
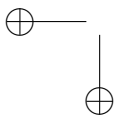


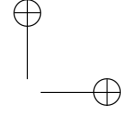
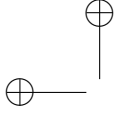


The Right to Heresy
Castello against Calvin

Stefan Zweig

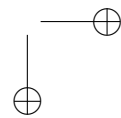
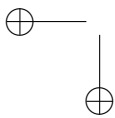
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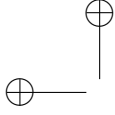




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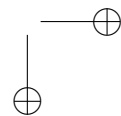
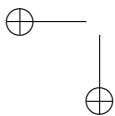
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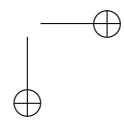
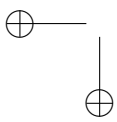
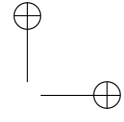
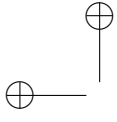




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INTRODUCTION

He who, though he falleth, is stubborn in his courage, and, being in danger of imminent death, is no whit daunted in his assurance: but, in yielding up the ghost, beholds his enemy with a scornful and fierce look – he is vanquished, not by us, but by fortune: he is slain but not conquered. The most valiant are often the most unfortunate. So are there triumphant losses more to be envied than victories.
– Montaigne, *Of Cannibals*.

“A fly attacking an elephant.” Such is the manuscript interpolation, in Sebastian Castellio’s own handwriting, on the Basle copy of his polemic against Calvin. At first it repels us a little, and we are inclined to regard it as one of the hyperbolic utterances to which the humanists were prone. Yet Castellio’s words were neither hyperbolic nor ironical. By the crude contrast, this doughty fighter merely intended to convey clearly to his





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friend Amerbach his own profound and distressing conviction that he was challenging a colossal antagonist, when he publicly charged Calvin with having been instigated by fanatical dogmatism in putting a man to death and thus slaughtering freedom of conscience under the Reformation.

When Castellio entered the lists in this perilous tourney, taking up his pen as a knight a lance, he was aware that a purely spiritual attack upon a dictatorship in the panoply of material armour would prove ineffectual, and that he was, therefore, fighting for a lost cause. How could an unarmed man, a solitary, expect to vanquish Calvin, who was backed by thousands and tens of thousands, and equipped with all the powers of the State? A master of the art of organization, Calvin had been able to transform a whole city, a whole State, whose numerous burghers had hitherto been freemen, into a rigidly obedient machine; had been able to extirpate independence, and to lay an embargo on freedom of thought in favour of his own exclusive doctrine. The powers of the State were under his supreme control; as wax in his hands were the various authorities, Town Council and Consistory, university and law courts, finance and morality, priests and schools, catchpoles and prisons, the written and the spoken and even the secretly whispered word. His doctrine had become law, and any





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one who ventured to question it was soon taught – by arguments that burked discussion, by the arguments of every spiritual tyranny, by gaol, exile, or burning at the stake – how in Geneva only one truth was valid, the truth of which Calvin was the prophet.

But the sinister power of the sinister zealot extended far beyond the walls of Geneva. The Swiss federated cities regarded him as their chief political ally; throughout the western world, the Protestants had appointed this “*violentissimus Christianus*” their commander-in-chief; kings and princes vied with one another in wooing the favour of a militant ecclesiastic who had established in Europe a Church organization second only in power (if second) to that ruled by the Roman pontiff. Nothing could happen in the political world without his knowledge; very little could happen there in defiance of his will. It had become as dangerous to offend the preacher of St. Pierre as to offend emperor or pope.

What was his adversary, Sebastian Castellio, the lonely idealist who, in the name of freedom of thought, had renounced allegiance to Calvin’s as to every other spiritual tyranny? Reckoning up the material forces available to the two men, it is no exaggeration to compare one of them to a fly and the other to an elephant. Castellio was a nemo,





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a nobody, a nullity, as far as public influence was in question; he was, moreover, an impoverished scholar, hard put to make a living for wife and children by translations and private tuition; a refugee in a foreign land, where he had no civil status nor even the right of residence, an *émigré* twice over: and, as always happens in days when the world has gone mad with fanaticism, the humanist was powerless and isolated amid contending zealots.

For years this great and modest and humane man of learning lived under the twin shadows of persecution and poverty, always in pitiful straits, yet inwardly free, because bound by no party ties, and because he had not let himself become enslaved by any of the prevailing forms of fanaticism. Not until his conscience was outraged by Calvin's murder of Servetus did he put aside his peaceful labours and attack the dictator, in the name of the desecrated rights of man. Not until then did this solitary prove himself a hero. Whereas his veteran opponent had a compact train of devoted followers (or, if not devoted, held in the trammels of a harsh discipline), Castellio could count on the support of no party, whether Catholic or Protestant. There was no great man, no emperor and no king to protect him, as such had protected Luther and Erasmus. Even the few friends and intimates





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who admired his courage, ventured only in secret to say a cheering word.

Dangerous indeed to life or limb was the public defence of a thinker who dared espouse the cause of the persecuted when fanatics were heresy-hunting and were racking or burning those who differed from them. Nor did Castellio confine himself to particular cases; he denied that those in the seats of the mighty were entitled to harm any one because of private opinions. Here was a man who, during one of those periods of collective insanity with which the world is from time to time afflicted, dared to keep his mind immune from popular hallucinations, and to designate by their true name of murder the slaughterings which purported to be made for the greater glory of God. Humane feeling compelled him to raise his lone voice, saying "I can no longer keep silence," and to besiege the heavens with clamours of despair concerning man's inhumanity to man. So perennial is the cowardice of our race, that Castellio and his like who defy those in high places, need look for few, if any, supporters. Thus it came to pass that in the decisive hour Sebastian Castellio found no backers, while his whole possessions were those which form the inalienable property of the militant artist: an unyielding conscience in an undismayed soul.





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Yet for the very reason that Sebastian Castellio knew from the first that his campaign would be unavailing and precisely because, knowing this, he unhesitatingly followed the call of conscience, his sacred stubbornness stamps for all time as a hero this “unknown soldier” in mankind’s great war of liberation. Because he had the courage to make his passionate protest against a worldwide terror, Castellio’s feud with Calvin must remain everlastingly memorable. In respect of the underlying problems, moreover, this historical struggle transcends the time limits of the period during which it took place. It was not a dispute about some narrowly definable theological point, nor about the man Servetus; nor was it one to decide the issue between liberal and orthodox Protestantism. A question of far wider scope and a timeless question was at stake in this contest. *Nostra res agitur*. A battle was opened which, under other names and in changing forms, has perpetually to be re-fought. Theology was no more than an accidental mask, worn because theology was the mode in sixteenth-century Geneva (and elsewhere). Castellio and Calvin were the symbolical expressions of an invisible but irreconcilable conflict. It matters not whether we term the poles of this enduring conflict toleration versus intolerance, freedom versus tutelage, humaneness versus fanaticism, individuality





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against mechanical uniformity, conscience against violence. In the last analysis these names signify an inward and personal decision as to which counts more for us: mankind or politics, the ethos or the logos, personality or community.

Every nation, every epoch, every thoughtful human being, has again and again to establish the landmarks between freedom and authority: for, in the absence of authority, liberty degenerates into licence, and chaos ensues; and authority becomes tyranny unless it be tempered by freedom. Buried deep in human nature is a mystical longing for the absorption of self into the community; and ineradicable is the conviction that it must be possible to discover some specific religious, national, or social system which will definitively bestow peace and order upon mankind. With pitiless logic, Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor proved that, for the most part, men are afraid of the gift of freedom; and in very truth the generality, from slackness in face of the enigmas that have to be solved and the responsibilities life imposes, crave for the mechanization of the world by a definitive and universally valid order which will save them the trouble of thinking.

This messianic yearning for a perdurable solution of the riddle of conduct is the ferment which smoothes obstacles out of the path of prophets. When the ideals of one generation have lost their





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fire, their zest, their vivid tints – enough for a man (or woman) equipped with strong powers of suggestion to declare apodictically that he and he alone has discovered the new and true formulas, and myriads will confidently accept the teachings of the nth messiah. A new ideology always creates a new type of idealism, and this is doubtless the metaphysical significance of ideologies. For whoever can give men a new illusion of unity and purity, will instantly stimulate the holiest of human energies: self-sacrifice and enthusiasm. Millions, as if under a spell, are ready to surrender themselves, to allow themselves to be fertilized, even to submit to rape; and the more such a revealer or prophet asks of them, the more they are willing to give. Liberty, which yesterday seemed to them their greatest good and their highest pleasure, they will fling away for his sake, and will unresistingly follow the leader, fulfilling the Tacitean aspiration “*ruere in servitium*,” so that, throughout history, the peoples, in a desire for solidarity, have voluntarily put their necks under the yoke and have kissed the hand into which they themselves have pressed the goad.

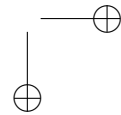
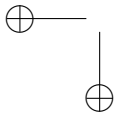
Thoughtful persons must be uplifted by the recognition that what, again and again in the story of our ancient, jejune, and mechanized world, has worked such miracles of suggestion, has ever





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been the power of an idea – that most immaterial of forces. We incline, therefore, to yield to the temptation of admiring these world-befoolers, who have succeeded in influencing crass matter by the might of the spirit. But, having gained the victory, such idealists and utopists, almost without exception, incontinently prove the worst of cheats. Power impels them to grasp universal power, victory leads to a misuse of victory; and, instead of congratulating themselves on having persuaded so many to accept their own pet illusions, on having gained disciples glad to live or to die for the cause, these conquistadors succumb to the itch for converting majority into totality. They crave to enforce their dogma upon those who are not party-members. The pliable, the satellites, the soul-slaves, the camp-followers of any big movement, do not suffice a dictator. Never will he be content until the free, the few independents, have become his toadies and their serfs; and, in order to make his doctrine universal, he arranges for the State to brand nonconformity as crime. Ever renewed is this curse that awaits religious and political ideologies, compelling them to degenerate into tyrannies as soon as they have established dictatorships. But directly a priest or a prophet ceases to confide in the immanent power of his faith or his teaching, and seeks to diffuse it by





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force, he declares war upon liberty. No matter what the dominant idea may be, whenever it has recourse to terror as the instrument for imposing uniformity upon alien convictions, it is no longer idealism but brutality. Even the purest of truths, when forcibly thrust upon malcontents, becomes the sin against the Holy Ghost.

This ghost, this spirit, is a mysterious element. Impalpable and invisible as air, it seems to enter without resistance into all forms and formulas. It misleads persons of despotic temperament into the fancy that they can compress it as much as they please, and reduce it to obedience in sealed flasks. But to every compression, it reacts dynamically by a proportional counter-pressure; and when very strongly compressed, it becomes an explosive, so that suppressive measures always lead to revolt. It is a consoling fact that, in the end, the moral independence of mankind remains indestructible. Never has it been possible for a dictatorship to enforce one religion or one philosophy upon the whole world. Nor will it ever be possible, for the spirit always escapes from servitude; refuses to think in accordance with prescribed forms, to become shallow and supine at the word of command, to allow uniformity to be permanently imposed upon it. How stupid and how futile is the attempt to reduce to a common denominator the divine





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multiplicity of existence, to divide human beings arbitrarily into black and white, good and bad, sheep and goats, true believers and heretics, loyalists and disloyalists – on the ground of a “principle” based exclusively upon the use of the strong hand. Always and everywhere there will crop up independents who sturdily resist any such restriction of human liberty, “conscientious objectors” of one sort and another; nor has any age been so barbaric, or any tyranny so systematic, but that individuals have been found willing and able to evade the coercion which subjugates the majority, and to defend their right to set up their personal convictions, their own truth, against the alleged “one and only truth” of the monomaniacs of power.

In the sixteenth century, although then as now the ideology of violence was rampant, there were free and incorruptible spirits. Letters from the humanists of those days bear witness to a profound distress at the disturbances caused by the champions of force. We are strongly moved by their detestation for the cheapjacks of dogma who cried in the marketplace: “What we teach, is true; and what we do not teach, is false.” As enlightened cosmopolitans, the humanists were horrified by the inhumanity of the “reformers.” These ran riot over the western world which had nurtured a faith in beauty, and they foamed at the mouth while pro-





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claiming their violent orthodoxies – men such as Savonarola, Calvin, and John Knox, who wished to make an end of beauty and to transform the globe into a moral seminary. With fateful perspicacity the humanists foresaw the disasters which such rabidly self-satisfied men would bring upon Europe. Through the clamour of tongues was already audible the clash of weapons, and the coming of a disastrous war could be confidently prophesied. But the humanists, though they knew the truth, did not dare fight for the truth. Almost always in life the lots are parted, so that a man of insight is not a man of action, and a man of action is not a man of insight. These sad-hearted humanists exchanged touching and admirably written letters, and complained often enough behind the closed doors of their studies; but none of them came into the open to defy Antichrist. Erasmus ventured, now and again, to shoot a few arrows out of his ambush. Rabelais, wearing fool's cap and motley, used fierce laughter as a scourge. Montaigne, a noble and wise philosopher, wrote eloquently about the matter in his *Essays*. But none of them struck shrewd blows in the endeavour to prevent the infamous persecutions and executions. Rendered cautious by experience, they said that the sage could find better occupation than attempting to control a mad dog, that it was a sensible man's





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part to keep in the background lest he should himself become one of the victims.

Castellio, however, earned his title to imperishable fame by being the one humanist to leave cover and wittingly to meet his fate. Heroically he espoused the cause of his persecuted companions, and thereby threw away his life. Unfanatically, though daily and hourly threatened by the fanatics, dispassionately, with Tolstoyan imperturbability, hoisting like a banner his conviction that no man should be subjected to force for holding this or that opinion as to the nature of the universe, he declared that no earthly power was entitled to exercise authority over a man's conscience. And because he uttered these opinions, not in the name of a party but as a spontaneous expression of the imperishable spirit of mankind, his thoughts, like many of his words, can never fade. Universally human and timeless thoughts, when minted by an artist, retain for ever the sharpness of their first moulding; and an avowal which tends to promote world unity will outlast disuniting, aggressive, and doctrinaire utterances. The unique courage of this forgotten worthy should serve as example to later generations, above all in the moral sphere. For when, in defiance of the theologians, Castellio styled Calvin's victim Servetus "a murdered innocent"; when, in reply to Calvin's sophisms, he





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thundered the imperishable utterance, “to burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine but slays a man”; when, in his *Manifesto on behalf of Toleration* (long before Locke, Hume, and Voltaire, and much more splendidly than they), he proclaimed once for all the right to freedom of thought – he knew that he was hazarding his life for the sake of his convictions. Let not the reader suppose that Castellio’s protest against the judicial murder of Miguel Servetus was on the same footing as the much more celebrated protests of Voltaire in the case of Jean Calas, and of Zola in the Dreyfus affair. Such comparisons nowise detract from the outstanding moral grandeur of what Castellio did. Voltaire, when he took up the cudgels for Calas, was living in a humaner age, and, as a famous writer, could count on the protection of kings and princes. Similarly Zola was backed by an invisible army, by the admiration of Europe and the world. Voltaire and Zola were doubtless risking reputation and comfort, but neither of them ventured his life. That is what Castellio ventured, knowing that in his fight for humaneness he would concentrate upon his luckless head all the inhumaneness of the cruel century in which he lived.

Sebastian Castellio had to pay the full price for his heroism, a price which emptied his energies to the dregs. This advocate of non-violence, who





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wished to use none but spiritual weapons, was throttled by brute force. Again and again do we see, as here, that there is scant hope of success for one who has at his command no other power than that of moral rectitude, and who, standing alone, joins battle with a compact organization. As soon as a doctrine has got control of the State apparatus and the instruments of pressure which the State can wield, it unhesitatingly establishes a reign of terror. The words of any one who challenges its omnipotence are stifled, and usually the dissentient speaker's or writer's neck is wrung as well. Calvin never attempted seriously to answer Castellio, preferring to reduce his critic to silence. Castellio's writings were censored, placed under an embargo, and destroyed wherever found. By the exercise of political influence, the adjoining canton was induced to deny him freedom of utterance within its borders. Then, as soon as his power of protest or criticism had been destroyed, when he could not even report the measures that were being taken against him, Calvin's satellites calumniously attacked him. There was no longer a struggle between two adversaries equipped with like weapons, but the ruthless bludgeoning of an unarmed man by a horde of ruffians. Calvin held sway over the printing presses, the pulpits, the professorial chairs, and the synods. Castellio's steps





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were dogged; eavesdroppers listened to his every word; his letters were intercepted. Can we wonder that such a briarean organization could easily get the better of the lonely humanist; that nothing but Castellio's premature death saved him from exile or the stake? The triumphant dogmatist and his successors did not scruple to wreak vengeance on their adversary's corpse. Suspicion and base invectives, posthumously disseminated, destroyed it like quicklime, and scattered ashes over his name. The memory of the solitary who had not only resisted Calvin's dictatorship, but had inveighed against the basic principle of dictatorship over the things of the spirit, was, so the zealots hoped, to pass from the minds of men for ever.

This last extremity of force was very nearly successful. Not merely was Castellio disarmed, gagged, and bound while his life lasted, but the methodical suppression of references to the great humanist consigned him to oblivion for many years after he was dead. Down to this day, a scholar need not blush never to have heard or mentioned the name of Sebastian Castellio. How could scholars know about him, seeing that the censorship of his chief writings endured for decades and for centuries? No printer who worked within Calvin's sphere of influence was bold enough to publish them; and when they at length appeared it was





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too late for them to establish his renown as pioneer. Others, meanwhile, had adopted his ideas. The campaign he initiated and in which he fell, was carried on in the wake of other standard-bearers. Many are foredoomed to live in the shadows, to die in the dark – village Hampdens and mute inglorious Miltons. Those who followed in Castellio's footsteps, harvested and garnered his fame; and in every schoolbook we may still read the error that Locke and Hume were the first advocates of toleration, the blunder being repeated and repeated as heedlessly as if Castellio's *De haereticis* had never been penned and printed. Forgotten is the author's moral courage, forgotten his campaign on behalf of Servetus, forgotten the war against Calvin ("a fly attacking an elephant"), forgotten are his writings. They are inadequately represented in the Dutch collected edition of translations; we find a few manuscripts in Swiss and Netherland libraries, and know of some utterances about Castellio by grateful pupils – these are the whole "remains" of a man whose contemporaries almost unanimously regarded him as one, not only of the most learned, but also of the most noble-minded, of his century. Great is the debt of gratitude still to be paid to this forgotten champion, and crying the injustice still to be remedied.

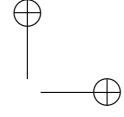
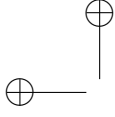




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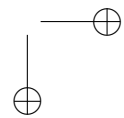
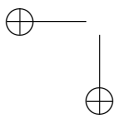
History has no time to be just. It is her business, as impartial chronicler, to record successes, but she rarely appraises their moral worth. She keeps her eyes fixed on the victorious, and leaves the vanquished in the shadows. Carelessly these “unknown soldiers” are shovelled into the common fosse of forgetfulness. *Nulla crux, nulla corona* – neither cross nor garland – records their fruitless sacrifice. In truth, however, no effort made by the pure at heart should be deemed futile or stigmatized as barren; nor is any expenditure of moral energy dissipated into vasty space to leave no repercussions. Though vanquished, those who lived before the time was ripe have found significance in the fulfilment of a timeless ideal; for an idea is only quickened to life in the real world through the endeavours of those who conceived it where none could witness the conception, and were ready for its sake to advance along the road to dusty death. Spiritually considered, the words “victory” and “defeat” acquire new meanings. Hence we must never cease to remind a world which has eyes only for monuments to conquerors, that the true heroes of our race are not those who reach their transitory realms across hecatombs of corpses, but those who, lacking power to resist, succumb to superior force – as Castellio was overpowered by Calvin in his struggle for the freedom of the spirit

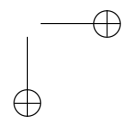
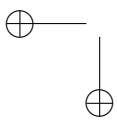
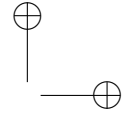
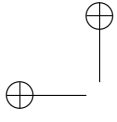




INTRODUCTION

and for the ultimate establishment of the kingdom
of humaneness upon earth.







CALVIN'S SEIZURE OF POWER

On Sunday, May 21, 1536, the burghers of Geneva, formally summoned by a trumpet blast, assembled in the principal square, and, raising their right hands, unanimously declared that henceforward they would live exclusively “*selon l'évangile et la parole de Dieu.*”

It was by referendum (an ultra-democratic institution which is still in vogue in Switzerland) and in the sometime episcopal palace, that the reformed religion was thus declared to be the only valid and permitted faith in Geneva – to be the faith of the city-State. A few had sufficed, not merely to drive the old Catholic faith from the town beside the Rhone, but to pulverize it and completely to extirpate it. Amid the menaces of the mob, the last priests, canons, monks, and nuns were expelled from the cloisters, while the churches,





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without exception, were purified from graven images and other tokens of "superstition." Then at length came this May Festival to seal the triumph. From that date, in Geneva, Protestantism had not merely the upper hand, but held exclusive sway.

This radical and unrestricted establishment of the reformed religion in Geneva was mainly the work of one terrorist, Farel the preacher. A man of fanatical temperament, with a narrow brow, domineering and relentless. "Never in my life had I seen so presumptuous and shameless a creature," says the gentle Erasmus. This "French Luther" exerted an overwhelming influence upon the masses. Small of stature, hideous, with a red beard and untidy hair, he thundered at them from the pulpit, and the fury of his violent nature aroused an emotional storm in the populace. Like Danton, a revolutionist in politics, so Farel, a revolutionist in the religious field, was able to combine the scattered and hidden instincts of the crowd, and to kindle them to a united onslaught. A hundred times before the victory, Farel had ventured his life, threatened in the countryside with stoning, arrested and put under the ban by all the authorities; but with the primitive energy and unscrupulousness of a man dominated by one idea, he forcibly broke down resistance. Attended by a bodyguard of storm troops, he rioted into a Catholic church

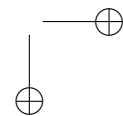




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while the priest at the altar was celebrating mass, he forced his way into the pulpit and, amid the acclamations of his supporters, fulminated against Antichrist. He organized the street arabs into a second army at his service, inciting gangs of children to raid the cathedral at service time, and to disturb the devotions of the Catholics by screams, a quacking noise like that of ducks, and outbursts of laughter. At length, emboldened by the growing number of his adherents, he mobilized his guards for the last attack, and instructed them to violate the monasteries, tear down the images of saints from the walls and burn these "idols." This method of brute force was successful. A small but active minority can intimidate the majority by showing exceptional courage, and by readiness to use the methods of a terror – provided that the majority, however large, is slack. Though the Catholics complained of these breaches of the peace, and tried to set the Town Council to work, on the whole they sat quietly in their houses, until, in the end, the bishop handed over his see to the victorious Reformation, and ran away without striking a blow.

But now, in the way of triumph, it became apparent that Farel was a typical uncreative revolutionist, able, by impetus and fanaticism, to overthrow the old order, but not competent to bring a





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new one into being. He was an adept at abuse, but devoid of formative talent; a disturber, not a constructor. He could rail against the Roman Church, could incite the dull-witted masses to hatred for monks and nuns; with sacrilegious hands, he could break the tables of the law. Having done this, he contemplated with hopeless perplexity the ruin he had made, for he had no goal in view. Now, when new principles were to be established in Geneva to take the place of the Catholic religion which had been driven out, Farel was a failure. Being a purely destructive spirit, he could only make a vacancy; for a street-corner revolutionist is never of the intellectually constructive type, destruction ends his task; another must follow in his footsteps to undertake the work of rebuilding.

Farel did not stand alone in his uncertainty at this critical moment. In Germany, likewise, and in other parts of Switzerland than Geneva, the leaders of the Reformation were disunited, hesitant, and perplexed at the mission history had assigned them. What Luther and Zwingli had originally planned was nothing else than a purification of the existing Church, a leading back of the faithful from the authority of the pope and the councils to the forgotten evangelical doctrine. For them, the Reformation signified at the outset that the Church was to be re-formed, that is to say, was





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to be bettered, purified, restored to its primitive integrity. Since, however, the Catholic Church stubbornly held to its views and would make no concession, they were faced by the need for working outside the Catholic Church instead of within – and forthwith, for when it is necessary to pass on beyond the destructive to the productive, there is a parting of the ways. Of course, there could have been nothing more logical than that the religious revolutionists, Luther, Zwingli and the other theologians of the Reformation, should have united in brotherly fashion upon a unified creed and a unified practice for the new Church. But when have the logical and the natural swayed the course of history? Instead of a worldwide and united Protestant Church, a number of petty Churches sprang up all over the place. Wittenburg would not hear a word of the theology of Zurich. Geneva repudiated the practices of Berne. Each town wished to have a Reformation of its own, in the Zurich, Bernese, or Genevese fashion. In every crisis, the nationalist arrogance of the European States was prophetically foreshadowed on a small scale in the arrogance of the cantonal spirit. In acrimonious disputations, in theological hair-splittings and tracts, Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon, Bucer, Karlstadt, and the rest of them, now proceeded to squander the energies which had served, so long





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as they held together, to undermine the gigantic structure of the Ecclesia Universalis. Farel was absolutely impotent in Geneva when he contemplated the ruins of the old order; this being the typical tragedy of one who has embraced the mission assigned to him by history, but is unequal to the duties that are imposed on him as a consequence of acceptance.

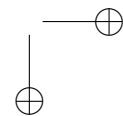
It was in a happy hour that the man who had been so luckless as to triumph, heard, by chance, that Calvin, the famous Jehan Calvin, was staying for a day in Geneva on his way home from Savoy. Farel hastened to call at the inn where Calvin put up, to ask the leader's advice and help as regards the work of reconstruction. For although Calvin was no more than six-and-twenty, being thus two decades younger than Farel, he already had uncontested authority. The son of an episcopal tax-gatherer and notary, born at Noyon in Picardy, educated (as Erasmus and Loyola had been) under the strict disciplines of Montagu College, being first intended for the priestly caste and then switched off in the direction of a legal career, Jehan Calvin (or Chauvin) had at the age of twenty-four to flee from France to Basle, owing to his advocacy of Lutheran doctrines.





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Most refugees forfeit their internal energies when they leave their homeland, but to Calvin what happened in this respect proved advantageous. At Basle, where two of the main roads of Europe crossed one another, and where the various forms of Protestantism encountered and conflicted with one another, Calvin, having enormous insight and being a profound logician, recognized the weighty significance of the hour. More and ever more radical theses had split away from the core of evangelical doctrine; pantheists and atheists, enthusiasts and zealots, were beginning to dechristianize and to superchristianize Protestantism. The dreadful tragicomedy of the Anabaptists of Münster had already come to a bloody and awesome close; the Reformation was in danger of breaking up into separate sects, and of becoming national instead of establishing itself as a universal power like its counterpart, the Roman Church. With the self-confidence of an inspired prophet, this man of twenty-five immediately realized what steps must be taken to prevent such a split in the reformed faith. The new doctrine must be spiritually crystallized in a book, a schema, a programme; the creative principles of evangelical dogma needed to be formulated. Aglow with the courage of youth, Calvin, an unknown jurist and theologian, recognized these necessities from the first. While the

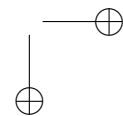




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accepted leaders were still disputing about details, he looked resolutely towards the whole, producing in a year his *Institutio religionis Christianae* (1535), the first publication to contain the principles of evangelical doctrine, so that it became the primer and guide-book, the canonical work of Protestantism.

This *Institutio* is one of the ten or twenty books in the world of which we must say without exaggeration that they have determined the course of history and have changed the face of Europe. It was the most important deed of the Reformation after Luther's translation of the Bible, and immediately began to influence Calvin's contemporaries by its inexorable logic and resolute constructiveness – qualities which made its influence decisive. Spiritual movements need a genius to initiate them and another genius to bring them to a close. Luther, the inspirer, set the stone of the Reformation rolling; Calvin, the organizer, stopped the movement before it broke into a thousand fragments. In a sense it may be said, therefore, that the *Institutio* rounded off the religious revolution, as the *Code Napoléon* rounded off the French. Both, drawing decisive lines, summed up what had gone before; both of them deprived a stormy and raging movement of the fiery impetus of its beginning, in order to stamp upon it the forms of law





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and stability. Thus arbitrariness became dogma, and freedom led to the birth of dictatorship, while spiritual ardour was rigidly shackled. Of course, whenever a revolution is bridled, it forfeits a good deal of its dynamic power. This is what happened to the Reformation in Calvin's hands but the upshot was that thenceforward the Catholic Church as a spiritually unified and worldwide entity was contraposed by a Protestant Church occupying a similar position.

Calvin's extraordinary strength is shown by the fact that he never mitigated or modified the rigidity of his first formulations. Subsequent editions of his book were expansions, but never corrections, of his first decisive cognitions. At five-and-twenty, like Marx or Schopenhauer, before gaining any experience, he logically thought out his philosophy to its conclusion. The remainder of his life was destined to witness the transplantation of this philosophy from the ideal world to the real one. He never altered an important word in what he had written; he never retraced a footstep, and never made a move in the direction of compromise with an adversary. Those who have to do with such a man must either break him or be broken by him. Half measures either for him or against him are futile. Unless you repudiate him, you must subjugate yourself to him without reserve.





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Farel (and therein is shown Farel's greatness) became aware of this at the first meeting, during the first conversation. Though so much older in years, from that hour he subordinated himself unreservedly to Calvin. He regarded Calvin as his leader and master, himself becoming a servant, a slave of that master. Never, during the next thirty years, did Farel venture to contradict a word uttered by his junior. In every struggle, in every cause, he took Calvin's side, hastening to join Calvin at any summons, to fight for him and aid him. Farel was the first disciple to tender that unquestioning, uncritical, and self-sacrificing obedience on which Calvin, a fanatical subordinator, insisted as being the supreme duty of every disciple. Only one request did Farel ever make of Calvin, and this was at the opening of their acquaintance. He wanted Calvin, as the sole competent receiver, to take over the spiritual leadership of Geneva, where the master, with his outstanding powers, would upbuild the Reformation in a way which had been beyond Farel's own strength.

Calvin disclosed later how long and how stubbornly he had refused to comply with this amazing call. For those who are children of the spirit rather than children of the flesh, it will always be a very responsible decision when they are asked to leave the sphere of pure thought in order to enter the



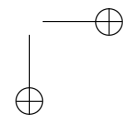


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obscure and disturbed regions of political realism. Such a secret dread mastered Calvin for a while. He hesitated, vacillated, said he was too young and too inexperienced. He begged Farel to leave him quietly in the world of books and problems. At length Farel lost patience at this obstinate renunciation of a call, and, with the sublime force of one of the Old Testament prophets, he thundered: "You plead the importance of your studies. In the name of Almighty God I declare unto you that His curse will light on you if you refuse your help in the Lord's work, and seek anything else in the world than Christ."

This emotional appeal moved Calvin and decided his career. He declared himself ready to upbuild the new order in Geneva. What he had hitherto been sketching and drafting in words and ideas, was now to become deeds and works. Instead of stamping the form of his will upon a book, he would henceforward try to impress it upon a city and a State.

The people who know least about a historical epoch are those who live in it. Moments of supreme importance clamour vainly for their attention; and hardly ever do the decisive hours of an era receive adequate notice from its chroniclers. Thus in the minutes of the Town Council of Geneva for the sitting of September 5, 1536, we read of Farel's

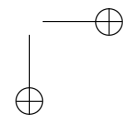




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proposal to appoint Calvin “*lecteur de la Sainte Escriptrue*,” but the minute-taker did not trouble to inscribe the name of the man who was to make Geneva famous throughout the world. The minute-secretary aridly records how Farel proposed that “*iste Gallus*” – that Frenchman – was to continue his activities as preacher. That is all. Why bother to inquire the right spelling of the man’s name, and enter the name in the minutes? We seem to be reading about an unimportant resolution to give this foreign preacher a small salary. For the Town Council of Geneva did not believe it had done anything more than appoint a subordinate official who would perform his duties as obediently as any other minor official, an usher, for instance, or a sidesman, or an executioner.

It can hardly be said that the worthy councillors were men of learning. In their spare time they did not read theological works, and we cannot suppose for a moment that any one of them had even fluttered the pages of Calvin’s *Institutio religionis Christianae*. Had they been scholars, they would certainly have been alarmed at the plenitude of powers assigned to “*iste Gallus*,” to this French preacher, within the congregation: “Here may be specified the powers with which the preachers of the Church are to be equipped. Since they are appointed as administrators and proclaimers of





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the divine word, they must venture all things, and must be ready to compel the great and the mighty of this world to bow before the majesty of God and to serve Him. They have to hold sway over the highest and the lowest; they have to enforce God's will on earth and to destroy the realm of Satan, to safeguard the lambs and to extirpate the wolves; they have to exhort and to instruct the obedient, to accuse and to annihilate the refractory. They can bind and they can loose; they can wield lightnings and scatter thunders, but all in accordance with Holy Writ." These words of Calvin, "the preachers have to hold sway over the highest and the lowest," must unquestionably have been ignored by the members of the Town Council of Geneva, for had they marked the words, they would not have thrust unlimited power into the hands of a man who made such sweeping claims. Never suspecting that the French refugee whom they appointed preacher at their church, had determined from the outset to become lord of the city and State, they gave him office and salary and dignity. Thenceforward their own powers were at an end, for, thanks to his resistless energy, Calvin would grasp the reins, would ruthlessly realize his totalitarian ambitions, and thus transform a democratic republic into a theocratic dictatorship.





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The initial steps taken by Calvin show his far-seeing logic and his clearly-thought-out aim. "When I first came into this church," he wrote subsequently, "the Reformation was at a standstill in Geneva. People preached there, and that was all. They got the images of the saints together and burnt them. But there was no Reformation worthy of the name. Everything was in disorder." Calvin was a born organizer, and detested disorder. His nature was mathematically precise, so that he was revolted by whatever was irregular and unsystematic. Any one who wishes to educate people to accept a new faith, must make them understand what they already believe and avow. They must be able to distinguish clearly between what is allowed and what is forbidden; every spiritual realm needs, no less than does every temporal realm, its visible boundaries and its laws. Within three months, Calvin submitted to this same Town Council a catechism all complete, for in its one-and-twenty articles the principles of the new evangelical doctrine were formulated in the most precise and comprehensible baldness; and this catechism, this Confession, which was to be, so to say, the decalogue of the new Church, was in principle accepted by the Council.

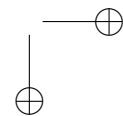
But Calvin was not a man to be satisfied by lukewarm acceptance. He insisted upon unreserved





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obedience down to the last punctuation mark. It was not enough for him that the doctrine should be formulated, since that might still leave the individual a certain amount of liberty to decide whether and to what extent he would comply. Calvin was not one who would ever tolerate freedom in respect of doctrine or of daily life. There was not to be a jot of give and take in religious and spiritual matters; there must be no truce with individual convictions; the Church, as he regarded it, had not merely the right but the duty to impose unquestioning obedience upon all men, to impose it by force, and to punish Laodiceanism as savagely as it punished open resistance. "Others may think otherwise, but I do not myself believe our office to be confined within such narrow limits that, it may be supposed, when we have preached a sermon, we have done our duty to the full and may fold our arms and let things take their course." His catechism not merely laid down guiding lines for true believers, but formulated the laws of the State. He demanded of the Council that the burghers of the city of Geneva should be officially compelled to acknowledge their acceptance of this Confession publicly, by oath, one after another. By tens the burghers were to be brought before the elders, like schoolboys before a master, betaking themselves to the cathedral, and there, with uplifted hands,





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they were to swear unreserved acceptance of the catechism after it had been read aloud to them by the secretary of State. Any who should refuse to take the oath were immediately to be expelled from the town. This signified plainly and once for all that no burgher from that day on was to live within the walls of Geneva and venture in spiritual matters to diverge by a hair's breadth from the demands and views of Calvin. An end had been made in the canton of what had demanded the "Christian man's freedom" to regard religion as a matter for individual conscience. The logos had gained a victory over the ethos, the law over the spirit, of the Reformation. There was to be no more liberty in Geneva, now that Calvin had entered the city. One will was to rule all.

Dictatorship is unthinkable and untenable without force. Whoever wants to maintain power must have the instrument of power in his hands; he who wants to rule, must also have the right of inflicting punishment. Now the resolution to which Calvin owed his appointment did not give him any right to expel burghers from Geneva for ecclesiastical offences. The councillors had appointed him "*lecteur de la Sainte Escripiture*" that he might interpret Holy Writ to the faithful; they had appointed him preacher that he might preach, and might guide





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the congregation to walk in the true faith. They considered that they had retained within their own hands the power of inflicting punishment, and that they, not Calvin or any preacher, were responsible for the behaviour of the burghers. Neither Luther nor Zwingli, nor any other of the reformers, had hitherto tried to take over such rights or powers, which were reserved to the civil authority. Calvin, being of an authoritarian nature, at once set to work to make the Council no more than the executive organ of his commands and ordinances. Since he had no legal right to do anything of the kind, he established a right for himself by introducing excommunication. By a stroke of genius he transformed the religious mystery of the Last Supper into a means for promoting his personal power and of exercising pressure on his adversaries. The Calvinist preacher, in due time, decided to admit those only to the Lord's Supper whose moral behaviour seemed satisfactory. But if the preacher refused to admit any one to the Lord's Supper, the person thus banned would be banned also in the civic sense. Here lay the intolerable might of the new weapon. No one was permitted any longer to speak of the offender, who was, as schoolboys say, sent to Coventry, no one could sell to him or buy from him; thus what had appeared at the outset to be a purely ecclesiastical instrument placed





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at the disposal of the spiritual authorities, was transformed into a social and business boycott. If the person against whom a boycott was declared would not capitulate, and refused to make public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, Calvin gave him short shrift, and commanded his banishment. An adversary of Calvin, though the most respectable of citizens, could no longer, once he had fallen into Calvin's disfavour, go on living in Geneva. One who differed openly from the preacher had his very existence as a citizen destroyed.

These fearsome powers enabled Calvin to annihilate any who ventured to resist. With one bold stroke he took both thunder and lightning into his hands, acquiring unchallengeable supremacy such as the Bishop of Geneva had never wielded. For within the Catholic Church there was an endless hierarchy of authorities proceeding from lower to higher and the highest place. Many appeals could be made, before the Church definitively decided to expel one of its adherents. Excommunication was a supra-personal act, completely beyond the arbitrary power of an individual. But Calvin, having a clearer aim and being more ruthless in the exercise of his will-to-power, heedlessly forced this right of expulsion into the hands of the preachers and the Consistory. He made the terrible threat of excommunication a regular punishment, thus

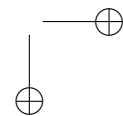




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intensifying beyond bounds his personal power. Being a psychologist, he had calculated the effects of such a terror, and guessed the anxiety of those who had occasion to dread such a fate. With great labour the Town Council managed to secure the administration of holy communion only once a quarter, instead of, as Calvin demanded, once a month, but Calvin never allowed this strongest of weapons to be snatched from him, the weapon of excommunication and consequent expulsion. Only by the use of that weapon could he begin the struggle to which he had from the first looked forward, the struggle for totality of power.

A considerable time usually elapses before a nation perceives that the temporary advantages of dictatorship, of a rigid discipline with consequent increase in combative energy, must be paid for by the forfeiture of many individual rights; and that inevitably the new law impinges upon ancient freedoms. In Geneva, as the years went by, this gradually became plain to the popular consciousness. The citizens gave their assent to the Reformation, voluntarily assembling in the market place as independent persons, to signify, by raising their hands, that they recognized the new faith, But their republican pride revolted against the supervision exercised by catchpoles. They strongly objected





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to being driven through the town like convicts, and compelled to swear obedience in the Church to every edict issued by My Lord Calvin. They had not approved a rigid moral reform in order that they might find themselves threatened with outlawry and exile merely for having uplifted their hearts in song when made merry by a glass of wine, or because they had worn clothes which seemed too bright of hue or too sumptuous to Master Calvin or Master Farel. People began to ask who were these fellows that assumed such commanding ways. Were they Genevese? Were they descendants of the old settlers, of those who had helped to create the greatness and the wealth of the city; were they tried and trusted patriots, connected for centuries by blood or marriage with the best families? No, they were newcomers, refugees from France. They had been hospitably accepted, provided with maintenance, shelter, lucrative positions; and now this tax-gatherer's son from a neighbouring country, having made a warm nest for himself, had sent for his brother and his brother-in-law, and he actually ventured to rail against and to browbeat burghers of standing. He, the French émigré, the man whom they had appointed to his new post, presumed to lay down the law as to who might and who might not live in Geneva!





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In the early days of a dictatorship, before the free spirits have been clubbed into submission and other persons of independent mind have been expelled, the forces of resistance hold their own for a while, and show a considerable amount of passion. So now in Geneva, persons with republican inclinations declared that they would not allow themselves to be treated "like pickpockets." The inhabitants of whole streets, above all those of the Rue des Allemands, refused to take the oath. They murmured rebelliously, declaring that they would never obey the commands of a French starveling, would never at his beck and call leave their homes. Calvin did, indeed, succeed in inducing the Small Council, which was devoted to his cause, to support his decree of expulsion against those who refused to take the oath; but he did not as yet hazard the enforcement of so unpopular a measure, while the result of the new elections showed plainly that the majority of the burghers in Geneva were beginning to turn against Calvin's arbitrary decrees. In February, 1538, his immediate followers no longer commanded a majority in the Town Council, so that once more the democrats in Geneva were able to maintain their will against the authoritarian claims of Calvin.

Calvin ventured too far and too fast. Political ideologists are apt to underestimate the strength of





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mental inertia, fancying that decisive innovations can be established in the real world as quickly as within their own excogitations. Calvin found it necessary to go slow until he had won the secular authorities to his support. He adopted milder ways, for his position was insecure. All the same, the newly elected Council, while keeping a sharp eye on him, was not actively hostile. During this brief respite, even his most strenuous adversaries had to recognize that the groundwork of Calvin's fanaticism was an unconditional fervour for morality; that this impetuous man was not driven along his course by personal ambition, but by love of a great ideal. His comrade at arms, Farel, was the idol of the young people and the mob, so that tension could easily be relaxed if Calvin consented to show a little diplomatic shrewdness, and adapted his revolutionary claims to the less extreme views of the burghers in general.

But here an obstacle was encountered in Calvin's granitic nature and iron rigidity. Throughout life, nothing could be further from this thoroughpaced zealot than a willingness for conciliation. He never understood the meaning of a middle course. For him there existed but one course – his own. All or nothing; he must have supreme authority or renounce his whole claim. Never would he compromise, being so absolutely convinced of the rightness





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of Jehan Calvin's standpoint that he simply could not conceive an opponent might believe in the rightness of another cause, and from a different point of view be as right as Master Calvin. It became an axiom for the latter that his business was to teach and other people's business was to learn. With perfect sincerity and imperturbable conviction, he announced: "I have from God what I teach, and herein my conscience fortifies me." Possessing terrific and sinister self-assurance, he compared his own views with absolute truth, and said: "*Dieu m'a fait la grâce de déclarer ce quest bon et mauvais*" (God has been gracious enough to reveal unto me good and evil). Yet again and again this man, who suffered from a sort of demoniacal possession by his own self, grew embittered and was genuinely outraged when another person with equal confidence maintained a contrary opinion. Dissent brought on in Calvin a nervous paroxysm. His mental sensibility affected the workings of his body. When he was crossed, his stomach revolted and he vomited bile. The antagonist might offer the most reasonable objections. That mattered nothing to Calvin, who was concerned only with the fact that another ventured to hold different views, and must consequently be regarded as an enemy, not only of Jehan Calvin, but of the world at large, and of God Himself. "Hiss-





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ing serpents,” “barking dogs,” “beasts,” “rascals,” “Satan’s spawn” – such were the names showered in private life by this overwrought and arrogant man upon the leading humanists and theologians of his day. To differ from Calvin was to detract from “God’s honour” in the person of His servant. Even if the difference was purely academic, the “Church of Christ was threatened” as soon as any one ventured to declare that the preacher of St. Pierre was dictatorially minded. So far as Calvin was concerned, what he meant by argument was that the other party to it must admit himself to have been wrong and must come over to Calvin’s side. Throughout life this man, who in other respects showed clear-sightedness, was never able to doubt that he alone was competent to interpret the word of God, and that he alone possessed the truth. But thanks to this overweening self-confidence, thanks to this prophetic exaltation, to this superb monomania, Calvin was able to hold his own in actual life. It was to a petrified imperturbability, to an icy and inhuman rigidity, that he owed his victory on the political stage. Nothing but such an intoxication with the self, nothing but so colossally limited a self-satisfaction, makes a man a leader in the domain of universal history. People are prone to accept suggestions, not when it comes from the patient and the righteous, but





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from monomaniacs who proclaim their own truth as the only possible truth, and their own will as the basic formula of secular law.

Thus Calvin was not in the least shaken to find that the majority of the newly elected Town Council was adverse to him, politely requesting him to abstain, for the sake of the public peace, from his wild threats and excommunications, and to adopt the milder views of the Bernese synod. An obstinate mule like Calvin will not accept an easy peace if it involves his conceding an iota. Compromise is impossible to such a man, and at the very time when the Town Council was contradicting him, he, who demanded from others absolute subordination to authority, would heedlessly rise in revolt against what for him should have represented constituted authority. From his pulpit he hurled invectives against the "Small Council," declaring "that he would rather die than fling the holy body of the Lord for dogs to devour." Another preacher declared in open church that the Town Council was "an assembly of toppers." Thus Calvin's adherents formed a rigid block in their defiance of authority.

The Town Council could not tolerate so provocative a revolt. At first it was content to issue an unmistakable hint to the effect that the pulpit must not be used for political purposes, since the business of those who held forth in the pulpit was





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simply and solely to expound the word of God. But Calvin and his followers having disregarded this official instruction, the Council, as a last resort, forbade the preachers to enter the pulpit; and the most insubordinate of them, Courtauld, was arrested for his incitations to rebellion. This implied open war between the powers of the Church and the powers of the State. Calvin promptly took up the gauntlet. Attended by his supporters, he forced his way into the cathedral of St. Pierre, sturdily mounted the steps of the proscribed pulpit, and, since representatives of the parties began to crowd into the church sword in hand, one side determined to support the interdicted preacher, and the other side to prevent him from making himself heard, a riot ensued, so that the Easter celebrations very nearly ended in massacre.

Now the Town Council's patience was exhausted. The Great Council of the Two Hundred, the supreme authority, was summoned, and was asked to dismiss Calvin and the other preachers who defied the municipal authorities. A general assembly of the citizens was summoned, and, by an overwhelming majority, on April 23, 1538, the rebel preachers were deprived of their positions and were ordered to leave the town within three days. A sentence of expulsion, of exile, which during the last eighteen





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months Calvin had fulminated against so many Genevese burghers, was now passed on himself.

Calvin's first attempt to take Geneva by storm failed. But in the life of a dictator reverses are of small moment. Indeed, it is almost essential that the ascent to a position which will give such a man uncontrolled power, should be marked at the outset by dramatic defeat. For arch-revolutionists, exile, imprisonment, outlawry, have never been hindrances to their popularity, but helps. One who is to be idolized by the masses must first have been a martyr. Persecution by a detested system can alone create for a leader of the people the psychological prerequisites of subsequent whole-hearted support by the masses. The more a would-be leader is tested, the more is the populace likely to regard him as mystically appointed. Nothing is so essential to the role of a leading politician as that he should pass into the background, for temporary invisibility makes his figure legendary. Fame envelops his personality in a luminous cloud, an aureole of glory; and when he emerges from it, he is able to fulfil expectations which have been multiplied a hundredfold, in an atmosphere which has formed without his stirring a finger on its behalf. It was in exile that many remarkable persons acquired an authority that is





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wielded only by those who have won affection and inspired confidence. Cæsar in Gaul, Napoleon in Egypt, Garibaldi in South America, Lenin in the Urals, became stronger through absence than they would have been had they remained present. So was it, too, with Calvin.

Granted that, in the hour of expulsion, it seemed as if all was up with Jehan Calvin. His organization destroyed, his work shattered, there remained nothing but the memory of a fanatical will to impose order, and a few dozen trustworthy friends. He was helped, however, like all those whose disposition leads them to eschew compromise and to withdraw into obscurity at dangerous times, by the errors alike of his successors and of his opponents. When Calvin and Farel, persons of impressive personality, had been cashiered, the municipal authorities found it difficult to shark up one or two servile preachers, who, fearing that resolute action on their part might make them unpopular, were readier to slacken the reins than to draw them tighter. With such men in the pulpit, the Reformation in Geneva, which had been so energetically undertaken by Calvin, soon came to a standstill, and the burghers were confused as to what was right and what was wrong in matters of faith, so that the members of the prohibited Catholic Church gradually regained courage, and

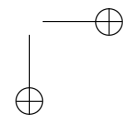




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endeavoured, through shrewd intermediaries, to reconquer Geneva for the Roman faith. The situation was critical, and steadily became more so. By degrees, the reformers who had thought Calvin too harsh and too strict, became uneasy, and asked themselves whether an iron discipline was not, after all, more desirable than imminent chaos. More and more of the burghers, among them some of those who had actively opposed Calvin, now urged his recall, and the municipal authorities could at length see no other course than to comply with the popular will. The first messages and letters to Calvin were no more than cautious inquiries; but soon they plainly and urgently expressed a desire for the preacher's return. The invitation was intensified into a passionate appeal. The Town Council no longer wrote to "Monsieur" Calvin asking him to come back and help the town out of its difficulties, but addressed its communications to "Maitre" Calvin. At length the subservient and perplexed councillors wrote imploring "their good brother and sometime friend" to resume his office as preacher, those who penned this missive declaring themselves "determined to behave towards him in such a way that he would have reason to be satisfied."

Had Calvin been petty, and had a cheap triumph been enough for him, he certainly might have felt





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satisfied at being besought to return to the city which two years ago had expelled him. But one who craves all will never put up with half measures; and, in this sacred cause, Calvin was not moved by personal vanity, he wanted to establish the victory of authority – his own authority. Not a second time was he willing to allow his work to be interfered with by any secular power. If he returned to Geneva, only one writ must run there, the writ of Jehan Calvin.

Not until Geneva came to him with fettered hands, with a humble and binding declaration of willingness to “subordinate” itself, would Calvin consider the negotiations to be on a satisfactory footing. With a disdain which he exaggerated for tactical reasons, he rejected these urgent offers. “A hundred times rather would I go to my death than resume the distressful struggles of earlier days,” he wrote to Farel. He would not move a step towards his exponents. When at length the municipal authorities, metaphorically speaking, kneeled before Calvin, beseeching him to come back, his closest friend Farel grew impatient and wrote: “Are you going to wait until the stones cry out for your return?” But Calvin stood to his guns until Geneva unconditionally surrendered. Not till the councillors swore to accept the Confession and to establish the requisite “discipline” in accordance



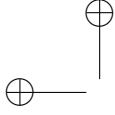


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with his will, not till they sent letters to the town of Strasburg asking their brethren in that city to spare them this indispensable man, not till Geneva had humiliated itself before the world at large as well as before himself, did Calvin give way and declare himself ready to assume his old office, providing he were given plenary powers.

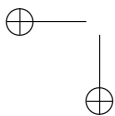
As a vanquished city makes ready for the entrance of the conqueror, so did Geneva prepare to receive Jehan Calvin. Everything possible was done to allay his displeasure. The old and strict edicts were hastily reimposed, that Calvin's demands might be conceded in advance. The Small Council found a suitable house with a garden for the man whose presence was now so greatly desired, and furnished it handsomely. The pulpit in the cathedral of St. Pierre was reconstructed, so that he could preach more effectively, and so that his person should be visible to every member of the congregation. Honour was heaped upon honour. Before Calvin left Strasburg, a herald was despatched from Geneva to meet him half-way on his journey with greetings from the city; and his family was ceremoniously fetched at the cost of the burghers. At length, on September 13th, a travelling carriage approached the Cornavin Gate. Huge crowds assembled to lead the returned exile into the city amid great rejoicings. Now Geneva





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was in his hands, to mould as a potter moulds clay; and he would not desist from his task until he had transformed the town to his own way of thinking. From that hour, Calvin and Geneva became two inseparable ideas, Calvin and Geneva, spirit and form, the creator and the creature.





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One of the most momentous experiments of all time began when this lean and harsh man entered the Cornavin Gate. A State was to be converted into a rigid mechanism; innumerable souls, people with countless feelings and thoughts, were to be compacted into an all-embracing and unique system. This was the first attempt made in Europe to impose, in the name of an idea, a uniform subordination upon an entire populace. With systematic thoroughness, Calvin set to work upon the realization of his plan to convert Geneva into the first Kingdom of God on Earth. It was to be a community without taint, without corruption, disorder, vice, or sin; it was to be the New Jerusalem, a centre from which the salvation of the world would radiate. This one and only idea was to embody Calvin's life; and the whole of his life was to be

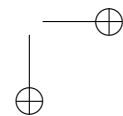




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devoted to service of this one idea. The iron ideologist took his sublime utopia most seriously, most sacredly; and never during the quarter of a century throughout which his spiritual dictatorship lasted, did Calvin doubt that he was conferring immense benefits upon his fellow men when he asked them to live “rightly,” which to him meant that they should live in accordance with the will and the prescriptions of God.

At first sight this may seem simple enough. But on closer examination, doubts arise. How is the will of God to be recognized? Where are His instructions to be found? In the gospels, answered Calvin; there, and there only. In Holy Writ, which is eternal, God’s will and God’s word live and breathe. These sacred writings have not been preserved for us by chance. God expressly transformed tradition into scripture, that His commandments might be plainly recognizable, and be taken to heart by men. This evangel existed before the Church and was superior to the Church; and there was no other truth outside or beyond (“*en dehors et au delà*”). Consequently, in a truly Christian State, God’s word, “*la parole de Dieu*,” was the supreme expression of morality, thought, faith, law, and life; the Bible, as a book, embodied all wisdom, all justice, all truth. For Calvin, the Bible was the alpha and the omega, the beginning and





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the end. All decisions in all matters must be based upon its texts.

By thus making the written word the supreme authority of mundane behaviour, Calvin seemed to be repeating the well-known primal demand of the Reformation. In reality he was making a huge step beyond the Reformation, and was breaking wholly away from its original circle of ideas. For the Reformation began as a movement to secure peace in spiritual and religious matters. It purposed to lay the gospels in every man's hands without restriction. Instead of the pope in Rome and the Councils of the Church, individual conviction was to shape Christianity. This “*Freiheit des Christenmenschen*” (freedom of the Christian man) inaugurated by Luther was, however, together with every other form of spiritual freedom, ruthlessly torn away from his fellow mortals by Calvin. To him, the word of the Lord was absolutely clear; and he therefore decreed that interpretations of God's word or glosses upon the divine teachings other than his own were inadmissible. As stone pillars support the roof of a cathedral, so must the words of the Bible sustain the Church that she may for ever remain stable. The word of God would no longer function as the *logos spermatikos*, as the eternally creative and transformative truth,

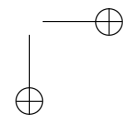




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but merely as truth interpreted once and for all by the ecclesiastical law of Geneva.

Calvin thus inaugurated a Protestant orthodoxy in place of a papistical one; and with perfect justice this new form of dogmatic dictatorship has been stigmatized as bibliocracy. One book was henceforward lord and judge in Geneva. God the legislator, and His preacher who was the sole authoritative interpreter of divine law, were judges in the sense of the Mosaic dispensation; were judges over the kings and over the people; were equipped with a power which it was sinful to resist. None but the interpretations of the Consistory were valid; they, and not decrees of the Town Council, were to be the bases of legislation in Geneva. They alone could decide what was allowed and what was forbidden; and woe unto him who should venture to challenge their ruling. One who denied the validity of the priestly dictatorship was a rebel against God; and the commentary on Holy Writ would soon be written in blood. A reign of force which originates out of a movement towards liberty, is always more strenuously opposed to the idea of liberty than is a hereditary power. Those who owe their position as governors to a successful revolution, become the most obscurantist and intolerant opponents of further innovation.





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All dictatorships begin with the attempt to realize an ideal, but an ideal takes form and colour from the persons who endeavour to realize it. Inevitably, therefore, Calvin's doctrine, being a spiritual creation, bore a physiognomical resemblance to its creator; and one need merely glance at his countenance to foresee that this doctrine would be harsher, more morose and oppressive, than any previous exegesis of Christianity. Calvin's face resembled the Karst, was like one of those lonely, remote, rocky landscapes which may wear the expression of divinity, but about which there is nothing human. Whatever makes our life fruitful, joyful, flowerlike, warm, and sensual (in the good meaning of that misused term), is lacking to this unkind, unsociable, timeless visage of the ascetic. Calvin's long, oval face is harsh and ugly, angular, gloomy, and inharmonious. The forehead is narrow and severe above deep-set eyes which glimmer like hot coals; the hooked nose masterfully projects from between sunken cheeks; the thin-lipped mouth makes a transverse slit in the face, a mouth which rarely smiles. There is no warm flush upon the wasted, ashen-hued skin. It seems as if fever must, like a vampire, have sucked the blood out of the cheeks, so grey are they and wan, except when, in fleeting seconds, under stress of anger, they become hectic. Vainly does the





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prophet's beard (and all Calvin's disciples and priests did their best to follow the fashion set by their master) strive to give this bilious countenance the semblance of virile energy. The sparse hairs, like the skin of the face to which they are attached, have no sap in them; they do not flow majestically downwards, like the beard of Moses in the old paintings, but sprout thinly, a mournful thicket growing on ungrateful soil.

A dark and cheerless, a lonely and tensed face! It is hardly credible that any one should want to have the picture of this grasping and hortatory zealot hanging upon the walls of his private rooms. One's breath would grow cold if one were continually to feel these alert and spying eyes fixed upon one in all one's daily doings. No store of individual cheerfulness could stand up against it. Zurbaran would probably have best succeeded in portraying Calvin, in the same style of Spanish fanaticism as that in which he represented the ascetics and the anchorites, dark upon a dark background; men who dwelt in caves far from the world, for ever looking at the Book, with, as other implements of their spiritual life, the death's-head and the Cross; men plunged into a chill, black, unapproachable loneliness. Throughout life, Calvin was guarded by this respect for human unapproachability. From earliest youth he wore sable raiment. Black was

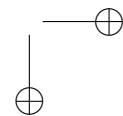




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the biretta which crowned the low forehead; this headdress being half-way between the hood of a monk and the helmet of a soldier. Black was the flowing cassock, which reached to the shoes; the robe of a judge whose business it is to punish men unceasingly; the gown of the physician, who must ever be trying to heal sins and ulcers. Black, always black; always the colour of seriousness, death, and pitilessness. Never did Calvin present himself in any other guise than that symbolic of his office; for he wished to be seen and dreaded by others in no other representation than that of God's servant, in the vesture of duty. He had no desire that others should love him as a man and a brother.

But if he was harsh to the world, he was no less harsh to himself, keeping the strictest discipline; allowing to the body, for the sake of the spirit, no more than the absolute minimum of food and rest. His night's sleep lasted for three hours, or four at most; he ate one frugal meal a day, hurriedly, an open book before him. He took no walk for pleasure, played no games of any kind, sought no form of relaxation, shunning, above all, those things he might genuinely have enjoyed. He worked, thought, wrote, laboured, and fought, in splendid devotion to the spirit; but never for an hour did he live his own private life.





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Calvin never knew what it was to enjoy youth, he was, so to say, born adult; another and fundamental characteristic was his total lack of sensuality. The latter quality was a grave danger to his doctrinal teaching. The other reformers believed and declared that man could serve the divine purpose faithfully by gratefully accepting God's gifts; essentially healthy and normal, they delighted in their health and in their power of enjoyment; Zwingli left an illegitimate child behind him in his first parish; Luther once said laughingly, "If the wife does not want it, the maid does" – one and all, they were men ready to drink deep and to laugh heartily. In contrast, Calvin completely suppressed the sensual elements in his nature, or allowed them to appear only in the most shadowy fashion. Fanatically intellectual, he lived wholly in the word and in the spirit. Truth was only truth to him when it was logical and clear and consistent. He understood and tolerated the orderly alone, detested the disorderly. Bigotedly sober, he never asked or derived pleasure from anything which can make a man drunken; wine, woman, art, or God's other jolly gifts to earth. The only time in his life when, to comply with the prescriptions in the Bible, he went a-wooing, he was not impelled by passion, but by the conviction that as a married man he would probably do better work. Instead of





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looking around and making his own choice, Calvin commissioned his friends to find him a suitable spouse, with the result that this fierce enemy of the sensual narrowly missed becoming contracted to a light woman. At length, in his disillusionment, he married the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted; but fate denied him the capacity for being happy. The only child his wife bore him was unviable. It died within a few days; and when, soon afterwards, his wife left him a widower, though he was no more than thirty-six, with twenty years of a man's prime to live, he had done with marriage and with women. He never touched another woman, devoting himself wholly to the spiritual, the clerical, the doctrinal.

Nevertheless a man's body makes its claims no less than does the mind, and takes a cruel revenge on him who neglects it. Every organ in our mortal frame utters an instinctive demand for a full use of its natural capacities. From time to time the blood needs to circulate more freely, the heart to beat more forcibly, the lungs to expand, the muscles to bestir themselves, the semen to find its natural destination; and he who continually encourages his intellect to suppress these vital wills, and fights against their satisfaction, is faced sooner or later by a revolt of the organs. Terrible was the reckoning which Calvin's body exacted from its





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disciplinarian. The nerves of the ascetic who tries to pretend or to persuade himself that they do not exist, emphasize their reality by perpetually tormenting the despot; and perhaps few masters of the spiritual life have suffered more distresses than did Calvin, because of the revolt of the flesh. One indisposition followed hard upon another. In almost every letter from Calvin's pen we read of some mischievous surprise-attack by an enigmatic malady. Now he talks of migraines, which keep him in bed for days; then of stomach-ache, headache, inflamed piles, colics, severe colds, nervous spasms, hemorrhages, gallstones, carbuncles, transient fever, rigors, rheumatism, bladder trouble. He was continually having to call in the doctor; his body seemed so frail that every part of it was liable to give way under strain, and to become a centre of revolt. With a groan, Calvin once wrote: "My health resembles a long-drawn-out dying."

But this man had taken as his motto, "*per mediam desperationem prorumpens convenit*" (to fight his way with renewed energy out of the depths of despair); and he refused to allow his indispositions to rob him of a single hour of labour. This turbulent body was to be perpetually resubjugated by his domineering spirit. If fever ran so high as to prevent his crawling to the pulpit, he would have himself carried to church in a litter, and preach





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notwithstanding. When he could not attend a sitting of the Town Council, he would summon the members to meet in his own house. If he were lying in bed, with chattering teeth and covered by four or five heated quilts, trying to arouse a sense of warmth in his poor shivering body, he would still have in the room two or three secretaries, and would dictate to each by turns. If he went to spend a day with a friend in the nearby countryside, in search of change of air, his famuli would drive thither in his carriage; and hardly had the party arrived when trains of messengers would be hastening to the city and back again. After each spell of illness he would seize the pen once more and resume his life of toil.

We cannot conceive of Calvin as inactive. He was a demon of industry, working without a pause. When other houses were still fast asleep, long before dawn the lamp would already be lighted in his study; and would go on burning for hours after midnight, when all the rest of Geneva had sought repose. But to those who looked up at his window towards sun-down and sun-up, it seemed as if this lonely lamp were ever burning. The amount of work he turned out was incredible, so that we cannot but think he must have kept four or five brains simultaneously engaged. It is no exaggeration to say that this confirmed invalid did actually do the





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work belonging to four or five different professions. His basic office, that of preacher at the cathedral of St. Pierre, was only one office among many which this pluralist, animated by an hysterical will-to-power, gradually got possession of; and although the sermons he delivered in the aforesaid cathedral filled, as printed volumes, a bookshelf, and although a copyist found his time fully occupied in transcribing them, they are but a small fraction of his collected writings. As chairman of the Consistory, which never came to a decision without his pulling the strings; as compiler of countless theological and polemic treatises; as translator of the Bible; as founder of the university and initiator of the theological seminary; as perpetual adviser of the Town Council; as political general-staff officer in the wars of religion; as supreme diplomat and organizer of Protestantism – this “Minister of Holy Writ” guided and conducted all the other ministries of his theocratic State. He supervised the reports of the preachers that came to hand from France, Scotland, England, and Holland; he directed propaganda in foreign parts; through book-printers and book-distributors, he established a secret service which extended its tentacles over the whole world. He carried on discussions with other Protestant leaders and negotiations with princes and diplomats. Daily, almost hourly, vis-





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itors arrived from foreign parts. No student, no budding theologian, could pass through Geneva without seeking Calvin's advice and paying his respects. His house was like a post office, a permanent source of information, as regards political and private affairs. With a sigh, he once wrote to a friend saying that he could not recall ever having had two consecutive hours during his official career to devote without interruption to his work.

From the most distant lands such as Hungary and Poland, there daily poured in despatches from his confidential agents, and he had to give personal advice to countless persons who applied to him for help. Now it was a refugee who wanted to settle in Geneva and arrange for his family to join him there. Calvin sent round the hat, and made sure that his co-religionist should secure welcome and support. Now it was some one who wanted to get married, now another who wanted to get divorced; both paths led to Calvin, for no spiritual event could occur in Geneva without his approval. If only lust for autocracy had been confined to its proper sphere, to the things of the spirit! Calvin, however, recognized no limit to his power, for, as a theocrat, he considered that everything mundane must be subordinated to the divine and the spiritual. Fiercely he laid his overbearing hand upon everything in the city





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and in the State. There is hardly a day, in the records of the sittings of the Town Council, in which we do not find the remark: "Better consult Maitre Calvin about this." Nothing could escape his watchful eyes; and even though we cannot but regard the incessant labours of this active brain as miraculous, such an asceticism of the spirit brings with it perils innumerable. Whoever completely renounces personal enjoyment, will, voluntary though his renunciation be, come to regard renunciation as a law to be imposed upon others, and will try to impose by force upon others what is natural to him but unnatural to them. Take Robespierre as an example; the ascetic is always the most dangerous kind of despot. One who does not share fully and joyfully in the life of his fellows will grow inexorable towards them.

Discipline and unsympathetic severity are the fundamentals of Calvinist doctrine. In Calvin's view man has no right, holding up his head and glancing frankly in all directions, to march undaunted through the world. He must always remain in the shadow of "the fear of the Lord," humbly bowing before the conviction of his hopeless inadequacy. From the outset, Calvin's puritanical morality led him to regard cheerful and unconstrained enjoyment as "sinful." Everything which can bring adornment and give impetus to





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our earthly existence, everything which can happily release the soul of its tensions, which can uplift, enfranchise, and relieve us of our burdens, is condemned by the Calvinist code as vain, void, and superfluous. Before all, these harsh judgments attach to art. Even in the religious realm, which has for ages been intimately associated with mysticism and ritual, Calvin enforces his own ideological matter-of-factness. Without exception, everything which can interest the senses, or can make the feelings pliable and uncertain, is swept ruthlessly aside; for the true believer must not approach the Throne with the strongly moved soul of an artist, clouded by the sweet aroma of incense, befooled by music, led astray by the beauty of what are wrongfully supposed to be pious pictures and sculptures.

Only when perfectly clear, is the truth the truth. God's word can rarely be God's word unless it is absolutely plain. Away, then, with idolatry! Throw pictures and statues out of the churches. Away with coloured vestments. Free the Lord's Table from mass-books and gilded tabernacles. God has no need of the ornate. Away with wanton junketings which numb the spirit: let no music, no sonorous organ play during divine service. Even the church bells, thenceforward, had to be still in Geneva, for the true believer does not need to be



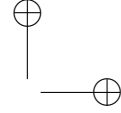
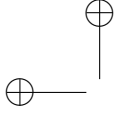


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reminded of his duty by the clang of metal. Piety is never preserved by things external to the spirit; never by sacrifices and spendings; but only by inward obedience. Clear out elaborate ceremony from the church; clear out emblems and ritual practices. Make an end of feasts and festivals. With one stroke, Calvin erased fête-days from the calendar. The celebration of Easter and Christmas, begun by the early Christians in the Roman catacombs, was abolished in Geneva. Saints' days were no longer recognized. All the old-established customs of the Church were prohibited. Calvin's God did not want to be celebrated, or even to be loved, but only to be feared.

It was presumptuous for man to try and draw nearer to God through ecstasy or uplifting of the spirit, instead of serving from afar with perpetual veneration. Herein lay the deepest significance of the Calvinist revaluation of values. Wishing to elevate the divine as high as possible above the world, Calvin threw the worldly down into the lowest depths. Wishing to give supreme dignity to the idea of God, he degraded the idea of man. The misanthropic reformer regarded mankind as an undisciplined rabble, a rout of sinners; and he never ceased to contemplate with horror and detestation the perpetually swelling current of mundane pleasures which life brings from a thousand sources

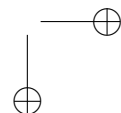
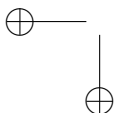




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to persons of less ascetic temperament. How incomprehensible has been God's decision, Calvin groans again and again, to create His creatures so imperfect and immoral, perpetually inclined towards vice and sin, incapable of recognizing the divine, and impatient to plunge once again in the deep waters of sin. Disgust seizes him when he contemplates his brothers in the faith. Never perhaps has a great founder of a religion used such degrading terms in his description of mankind: "*bête indomptable et féroce*," and, yet worse, "*un ordure*." Again, in his *Institutio*: "If we contemplate man only in respect of his natural gifts, we find in him, from the crown of his head to the sole of his feet, no trace whatever of goodness. Whatever in him is a little praiseworthy, comes from the grace of God. . . . All our justice is injustice; our service, filth; our glory, shame. Even the best things that rise out of us are always made infect and vicious by the uncleanness of the flesh, and are always mingled with dirt."

Obviously one who, from the philosophic standpoint, regards man as an unsuccessful and abortive piece of workmanship on God's part, will never be willing, as theologian and statesman, to concede that God can have given such a creature a jot of liberty or independence. Ruthlessly, the Almighty must deprive this corrupt and greedy creature of





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the right of self-determination, for “if we leave man to his own devices, his soul is capable of naught but evil.” Once for all, we must rebuke the spawn of Adam for the presumptuous notion that they have any right to develop their relationship to God and to the world here below in accordance with their own personality; and the more harshly we repress such presumption, the more we subordinate and bridle man, the better for him. No liberty, no freedom of the will, for man could only misuse such privileges. He must forcibly humble himself before the greatness of God. We must render him sober, we must frighten him, rebuking his presumption, until he unresistingly accepts his position in the pious and obedient herd, until he has merged in that herd all that is individual within him, so that the individual, the extraordinary, vanishes without leaving a trace.

To achieve this draconian suppression of personality, to achieve this vandal expropriation of the individual in favour of the community, Calvin had a method all his own, the famous Church “discipline.” A harsher curb upon human impulses and desires has hardly been devised by and imposed upon man down to our own days. From the first hour of his dictatorship, this brilliant organizer herded his flock, his congregation, within a barbed-wire entanglement of paragraphs and prohibitions,





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the so-called “Ordinances”; simultaneously creating a special department to supervise the working of terrorist morality. The organization of which we have just spoken was called the Consistory, its purpose being defined, ambiguously enough, as that of supervising the congregation or the community “that God may be honoured in all purity.” Only to outward seeming was the sphere of influence of this moral inspectorate restricted to the religious life. For, owing to the intimate association of the secular or mundane with the philosophical in Calvin’s totalitarian conception of the State, the vestiges of independence were henceforward to come automatically under the control of the authorities. The catchpoles of the Consistory, the “*anciens*,” were expressly instructed to keep watch upon the private life of every one in Geneva. Their watchfulness must never be relaxed, and they were expected to pay attention, “not only to the uttered word, but also to opinions and views.”

From the days when so universal a control of private life was instituted, private life could hardly be said to exist any longer in Geneva. With one leap, Calvin outdistanced the Catholic Inquisition, which had always waited for reports of informers or denunciations from other sources before sending out its familiars and its spies. In Geneva, however, in accordance with Calvin’s religious phi-





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losophy, every human being was primarily and perpetually inclined to evil rather than to good, was *a priori* suspect as a sinner, so every one must put up with supervision. After Calvin's return to Geneva, it was as if the doors of the houses had suddenly been thrown open and as if the walls had been transformed into glass. From moment to moment, by day and by night, there might come a knocking at the entry, and a number of "spiritual police" announce a "visitation" without the citizen concerned being able to offer resistance. Once a month, rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, had to submit to the questioning of these professional "*police des meurs*." For hours (since the ordinances declared that such examination must be done in leisurely fashion), white-haired, respectable, tried, and hitherto trusted men, must be examined like schoolboys as to whether they knew the prayers by heart, or as to why they had failed to attend one of Master Calvin's sermons. But with such catechizing and moralizing, the visitation was by no means at an end. The members of this moral Cheka thrust fingers into every pie. They felt the women's dresses to see whether their skirts were not too long or too short, whether these garments had superfluous frills or dangerous slits. The police carefully inspected the coiffure, to see that it did not tower too high; they counted the





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rings on the victim's fingers, and looked to see how many pairs of shoes there were in the cupboard. From the bedroom they passed on to the kitchen table, to ascertain whether the prescribed diet was not being exceeded by a soup or a course of meat, or whether sweets and jams were hidden away somewhere. Then the pious policeman would continue his examination of the rest of the house. He pried into bookshelves, on the chance of there being a book devoid of the Consistory's imprimatur; he looked into drawers on the chance of finding the image of one of the saints, or a rosary. The servants were asked about the behaviour of their masters, and the children were cross-questioned as to the doings of their parents.

As he walked along the street, this minion of the Calvinist dictatorship would keep his ears pricked to ascertain whether any one was singing a secular song, or was making music, or was addicted to the diabolic vice of cheerfulness. For henceforward in Geneva the authorities were always on the hunt for anything that smacked of pleasure, for any "paillardise," and woe unto a burgher caught visiting a tavern when the day's work was over to refresh himself with a glass of wine, or unto another who was so depraved as to find pleasure in dice or cards. Day after day the hunt went on, nor could the overworked spies enjoy rest on the





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Sabbath. Once more they would make a house-to-house visitation where some slothful wretch was lying in bed instead of seeking edification from Master Calvin's sermon. In the church another informer was on the watch, ready to denounce any one who should enter the house of God too late or leave it too early. These official guardians of morality were at work everywhere indefatigably. When night fell, they pried among the bushes beside the Rhone, to see if a sinful pair might be indulging in caresses; while in the inns they scrutinized the beds and ransacked the baggage of strangers. They opened every letter which entered or left the city; and the carefully organized watchfulness of the Consistory extended far beyond the walls of the city. In the diligence, in public rowing boats, in ships crossing the lake for the foreign market, and in the inns beyond the town limits, spies were everywhere at work. Any word of discontent uttered by a Genevese citizen who might be visiting Lyons or Paris, would infallibly be reported. But what made the situation yet more intolerable was that countless unofficial spies joined their activities as volunteers to those who were properly appointed to the task. Whenever a State inaugurates a reign of terror, the poisonous plant of voluntary denunciation flourishes like a loathsome weed; when it is agreed on principle that denunciations shall be





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tolerated and are even desirable, otherwise decent folk are driven by fear to play the part of informer. If it were only to divert suspicion "of being on the side of the devil instead of God," every Genevese citizen in the days of Calvin's dictatorship looked askance at his fellows. The "*zelo della paura*," the zeal of dread, ran impatiently ahead of the informers. After some years, the Consistory was able to abolish official supervision, since all the citizens had become voluntary controllers. The restless current of denunciations streamed in by day and by night, and kept the mill wheel of the spiritual Inquisition turning briskly.

Who could feel safe under such a system, could be sure that he was not breaking one of the commandments, since Calvin forbade practically everything which might have made life joyful and worth while? Prohibited were theatres, amusements, popular festivals, any kind of dancing or playing. Even so innocent a sport as skating stirred Calvin's bile. The only tolerated attire was sober and almost monkish. The tailors, therefore, were forbidden, unless they had special permission from the town authorities, to cut in accordance with new fashions. Girls were forbidden to wear silk before they reached the age of fifteen years; above that age, they were not allowed to wear velvet. Gold and silver lace, golden hair, needless buttons





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and furbelows, were equally under the ban, and the wearing of gold ornaments or other trinkets was against the regulations. Men were not allowed to wear their hair long; women were forbidden to make much of their tresses by curling them, and training them over combs. Lace was forbidden; gloves were forbidden; frills and slashed shoes were forbidden. Forbidden was the use of litters and of wheeled carriages. Forbidden were family feasts to which more than twenty persons had been invited; at baptisms and betrothal parties, there must not be more than a specified number of courses, and sweets or candied fruits must not be served. No other wine than the red wine of the region might be drunk, while game, whether four footed or winged, and pastry, were prohibited. Married folk were not allowed to give one another presents at the wedding, or for six months afterwards. Of course, any sort of extra-conjugal intercourse was absolutely forbidden; and there must be no laxity in this respect even among people who had been formally engaged.

The citizens of Geneva were not allowed to enter an inn and the host of such a place must not serve a stranger with food and drink until the latter had said his prayers. In general, the tavern-keepers were instructed to spy upon their guests, paying diligent heed to every suspicious word or gesture.





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No book might be printed without a special permit. It was forbidden to write letters abroad. Images of the saints, other sculptures, and music were forbidden. Even as regards psalm-singing, the ordinances declared that "care must be taken" to avoid allowing attention to wander to the tune, instead of concentrating it upon the spirit and the meaning of the words: for "only in the living word may God be praised." The citizens, who before Calvin's coming had regarded themselves as free burghers, were now not even allowed to choose the baptismal names of their children. Although for hundreds of years the names of Claude and Amadé had been popular, they were now prohibited because they did not occur in the Bible. A pious Genevese must name his son Isaac, Adam, or the like. It was forbidden to say the Lord's Prayer in Latin, forbidden to keep the feasts of Easter and Christmas. Everything was forbidden which might have relieved the grey monotony of existence; and forbidden, of course, was any trace of mental freedom in the matter of the printed or spoken word. Forbidden as the crime of crimes was any criticism of Calvin's dictatorship; and the town crier, preceded by drummers, solemnly warned the burghers that "there must be no discussion of public affairs except in the presence of the Town Council."





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Forbidden, forbidden, forbidden: what a detestable rhythm! In amazement one asks oneself, what, after so many prohibitions, was left to the Genevese as permissible. Not much. It was permissible to live and to die, to work and to obey, and to go to church. This last, indeed, was not merely permitted, but enforced under pain of severe punishment in case of absence. Woe unto the burgher who should fail to hear the sermons preached in the parish to which he belonged; two on Sunday, three in the course of the week, and the special hour of edification for children. The yoke of coercion was not lifted even on the Lord's Day, when the round of duty, duty, duty, was inexorable. After hard toil to gain daily bread throughout the week, came the day when all service must be devoted to God. The week for labour, Sunday for church. Thus Satan would be unable to gain or keep a footing even in sinful man; and thus an end would be put to liberty and the joy of life.

But how, we ask in amazement, could a republican city, accustomed for decades to Swiss freedom, tolerate a dictatorship as rigid as had been Savonarola's in Florence; how could a southern people, fundamentally cheerful, endure such a throttling of the joy of life? Why was an ascetic like Calvin empowered to sweep away joy from





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thousands upon thousands? Calvin’s secret was not a new one; his art was that which all dictators before and since have used. Terror. Calvin’s was a Holy Terror. Do not let us mince matters: force that sticks at nothing, making mock of humanness as the outcome of weakness, soon becomes overwhelming. A systematic despotically imposed reign of terror, paralyses the will of the individual, making community life impossible. Like a consuming disease, it eats into the soul; and soon, this being the heart of the mystery, universal cowardice gives the dictator helpers everywhere; for, since each man knows himself to be under suspicion, he suspects his neighbours; and, in a panic, the zealots outrun the commands and prohibitions of their tyrant.

An organized reign of terror never fails to work miracles; and when his authority was challenged, Calvin did not hesitate to work this miracle again and again. Few if any other despots have outdone him in this respect; and it is no excuse to say that his despotism, like all his qualities, was a logical product of his ideology. Agreed, this man of the spirit, this man of the nerves, this intellect, had a hatred of bloodshed. Being, as he himself openly admitted, unable to endure the sight of cruelty, he never attended one of the executions and burnings which were so frequent in Geneva during the days





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of his rule. But herein lies the gravest fault of fervent ideologists. Men of this type, who (once more like Robespierre) would never have the pluck to witness an execution, and still less to carry it out with their own hands, will heedlessly order hundreds or thousands of death sentences as soon as they feel themselves covered by their "Idea," their theory, their system. Now Calvin regarded harshness towards "sinners" as the key-stone of his system; and to carry this system unremittingly into effect was for him, from his philosophical outlook, a duty imposed on him by God. That was why, in defiance of the prompting of his own nature, he had to quench any inclination to be pitiful and to train himself systematically in cruelty. He "exercised" himself in unyieldingness as if it had been a fine art.

"I train myself in strictness that I may fight the better against universal wrongdoing." We cannot deny that this man of iron will was terribly successful in his self-discipline to make himself unkind. He frankly admitted that he would rather know that an innocent man had been punished, than that one sinner should escape God's judgment. When, among the numerous executions, one was prolonged into an abominable torture by the clumsiness of the executioner, Calvin wrote an exculpatory letter to Farel: "It cannot have





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happened without the peculiar will of God that the condemned persons were forced to endure such a prolongation of their torments.” It is better to be too harsh than too gentle, if “God’s honour” is concerned – such was Calvin’s argument. Nothing but unsparing punishment can make human behaviour moral.

It is easy to understand how murderous must be the effects of such a thesis of the pitiless Christ, and of a God whose honour had perpetually to be “protected.” What was the upshot likely to be in a world that had not yet escaped from the Middle Ages? During the first five years of Calvin’s rule, in this town which had a comparatively small population, thirteen persons were hanged, ten decapitated, five-and-thirty burned; while seventy-six persons were driven from their houses and homes – to say nothing of those who ran away in time to avoid the operations of the terror. So crowded were the prisons in the “New Jerusalem” that the head gaoler informed the magistrates he could not find accommodation for any more prisoners. So horrible was the martyrdom not only of condemned persons but also of suspects, that the accused laid violent hands upon themselves rather than enter the torture chambers. At length the Council had to issue a decree to the effect that “in order to reduce the number of such incidents, the prison-





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ers should wear handcuffs day and night.” Calvin uttered no word against these abominations. Terrible was the price which the city had to pay for the establishment of such “order” and “discipline”; for never before had Geneva known so many death sentences, punishments, rackings, and exilings, as now when Calvin ruled there in the name of God. Balzac, therefore, is right when he declares the religious terrorism of Calvin to have been even more abominable than the worst blood-orgies of the French Revolution. “Calvin’s rabid religious intolerance was morally crueller than Robespierre’s political intolerance; and if he had had a more extensive sphere of influence than Geneva, he would have shed more blood than the dread apostle of political equality.”

All the same, it was not by means mainly of these barbarous sentences and executions and tortures that Calvin broke the Genevese sentiment of liberty; but, rather, by systematized petty tyranny and daily intimidation. At the first glance we are inclined to be amused when we read with what trifles Calvin’s famous “discipline” was concerned. Still, the reader will be mistaken if he underestimates the refined skill of Master Jehan Calvin. Deliberately he made the net of prohibitions one with an exceedingly fine mesh, so fine that it was practically impossible for the fish to escape. Pur-





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posely these prohibitions related to trivial matters, so that everyone might suffer pangs of conscience, and become inspired with a permanent awe of almighty, all-knowing, authority. For the more caltrops that are strewed in front of us on our everyday road, the harder shall we find it to march forward freely and unconcernedly. Soon no one felt safe in Geneva, since the Consistory declared that human beings sinned almost every time they drew breath.

We need merely turn the pages of the minute-book of the Town Council to see how skilful were the methods of intimidation. One burgher smiled while attending a baptism: three days' imprisonment. Another, tired out on a hot summer day, went to sleep during the sermon prison. Some working men ate pastry at breakfast: three days on bread and water. Two burghers played skittles: prison. Two others diced for a quarter bottle of wine: prison. A man refused to allow his son to be christened Abraham: prison. A blind fiddler played a dance: expelled from the city. Another praised Castellio's translation of the Bible: expelled from Geneva. A girl was caught skating, a widow threw herself on the grave of her husband, a burgher offered his neighbour a pinch of snuff during divine service: they were summoned before the Consistory, exhorted, and ordered to





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do penance. And so on, and so on, without end. Some cheerful fellows, at Epiphany, stuck a bean into the cake: four-and-twenty hours on bread and water. A burgher said “Monsieur” Calvin instead of “Maitre” Calvin; a couple of peasants, following ancient custom, talked about business matters on coming out of church: prison, prison, prison. A man played cards: he was pilloried with the pack of cards hung round his neck. Another sang riotously in the street: was told “he could go and sing elsewhere,” this meaning that he was banished from the city. Two bargees had a brawl, in which no one was hurt: executed. Two boys, who behaved indelicately, were sentenced first of all to burning at the stake, then the sentence was commuted to compelling them to watch the blaze of the faggots.

Most savagely of all were punished any offenders whose behaviour challenged Calvin’s political and spiritual infallibility. A man who publicly protested against the reformer’s doctrine of predestination, was mercilessly flogged at all the cross-ways of the city and then expelled. A book-printer, who, in his cups, had railed at Calvin, was sentenced to have his tongue perforated with a red hot iron before being expelled from the city. Jacques Gruet was racked and then executed merely for having called Calvin a hypocrite. Each offence,



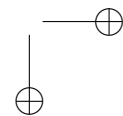


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even the most paltry, was carefully entered in the records of the Consistory so that the private life of every citizen could unfailingly be held up against him in evidence.

It was inevitable that so unsleeping a terror should, in the end, banish a sense of dignity and a feeling of energy both from individuals and from the masses. When, in a State organization, every citizen has to accept that he will be questioned, examined, and condemned, since he knows that invisible spies are watching all his doings and noting all his words; when, without notice, either by day or by night, his house is liable to “visitations” – then people’s nerves give way, and a sort of mass anxiety ensues, which extends by infection even to the most courageous. The strongest will is broken by the futility of the struggle. Thanks to his famous “discipline,” Calvin’s Geneva became what Calvin wanted: joyless, shy, and timid, with no capacity for resisting Master Calvin’s will.

After a few years of this discipline, Geneva assumed a new aspect. What had once been a free and merry city, lay as it were beneath a pall. Bright garments disappeared, colours became drab, no bells rang from the church towers, no jolly songs re-echoed in the streets, every house became as bald and unadorned as a Calvinist place of worship.





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The inns were empty, now that the fiddlers could no longer summon people to the dance, now that skittles could no longer be played, now that dice no longer rattled gaily on the tables. The dance-halls were empty; the dark alleys, where lovers had been wont to roam, were forsaken; only the naked interiors of the churches were the places, Sunday after Sunday, for gloomy-visaged and silent congregations. The town had assumed a morose visage like Calvin's own, and by degrees had grown as sour as he, and, either from fear or through unconscious imitation of his sternness, as sinister and reserved. People no longer roamed freely and lightheartedly hither and thither; their eyes could not flash gladly; and their glances betrayed nothing but fear, since merriment might be mistaken for sensuality. They no longer knew unconstraint, being afraid of the terrible man who himself was never cheerful. Even in the privacy of family life, they learned to whisper, for beyond the doors, listening at the keyholes, might be their serving men and maids. When fear has become second nature, the terror-stricken are perpetually on the look-out for spies. The great thing was, not to be conspicuous. Not to do anything that might arouse attention, either by one's dress or by a hasty word, or by a cheerful countenance. Avoid attracting suspicion; remain forgotten. The Genevese, in the latter years of





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Calvin’s rule, sat at home as much as possible, for at home the walls of their houses and the bolts and bars on their doors might preserve them to some extent from prying eyes and from suspicion. But if, when they were looking out of the window, they saw some of the catchpoles of the Consistory coming along the street, they would draw back in alarm, for who could tell what neighbour might not have denounced them? When they had to go out, the citizens crept along furtively with down-cast eyes and wrapped in their drab cloaks, as if they were going to a sermon or a funeral. Even the children, who had grown up amid this new discipline, and were vigorously intimidated during the “lessons of edification,” no longer played in the debonair way natural to healthy and happy youngsters, but shrank as a cur shrinks in expectation of a blow. They flagged as do flowers which have never known sufficient sunlight, but have been kept in semi-darkness.

The rhythm of the town was as regular as that of a clock, a chill tick-tack, never interrupted by festivals and fête-days – monotonous, orderly, and dependable. Any one visiting Geneva for the first time and walking through its streets, must have believed the city to be in mourning, so cold and gloomy were the inhabitants, so mute and cheerless the ways, so oppressive the spiritual atmosphere.





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Discipline was wonderfully maintained; but this intolerable moderation that Calvin had forced upon Geneva had been purchased by the loss of all the sacred energies, which can never thrive except where there is excess and unrestrained freedom. Though Geneva produced a great number of pious citizens, earnest theologians, and distinguished scholars, who made the city famous for all time, still, even two centuries after Calvin, there were in this town beside the Rhone no painters, no musicians, no artists with a worldwide reputation. The extraordinary was sacrificed to the ordinary, creative liberty to a thoroughly tamed servility. When, at long last, an artist was born in Geneva, his whole life was a revolt against the shackling of individuality. Only through the instrumentality of the most independent of its citizens, through Jean Jacques Rousseau, was Geneva able to liberate itself from the strait-waistcoat imposed upon it by Calvin.





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A dictator who is feared is not necessarily loved; and those who submit to a reign of terror may be far from acknowledging its justification. No doubt, during the first months after Calvin's return to Geneva, the burghers and the civil authorities were unanimous in their admiration. All parties seemed well affected towards him. Since there was only one party, and only one supremacy, all were constrained to admit that the dictator moved resolutely towards his goal. Most of those to rule over whom he had been recalled, were carried away by the intoxication of unity. Soon a soberer mood set in. The men who had summoned Calvin to restore order, were inspired by the secret hope that this fierce dictator, when he had accomplished what was expected of him, would prove somewhat less draconian in his zeal for morality. Instead, from





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day to day the “discipline” grew stricter. Far from slackening the curb, and far from uttering a word of thanks to his fellow-citizens for the enormous sacrifices they were making by the surrender of individual liberty and of joyfulness, he continued to rail against them from the pulpit, declaring, to their profound disappointment, that the gallows was needed to stretch the necks of seventeen or eighteen hundred young men of Geneva before morality and discipline could be established in so corrupt a city. The Genevese at length realized that, instead of summoning one who would effect the mental healing they desired, they had brought back within the city walls one who would lay shackles on their freedom, and one whose more and more outrageously coercive measures would, in the end, alienate even the most loyal of his adherents.

Within a few months dissatisfaction with Calvin was again rife; for his boasted “discipline” had seemed far more seductive as a wish-dream than in reality. The glamour and romance had faded, and those who yesterday were rejoicing now began to murmur. Still, a palpable and easily understood reason is needed to shake the prestige of a dictator; nor was Calvin slow to provide one. The Genevese first began to doubt the infallibility of the Consistory during an epidemic of plague, which devastated the city from 1542 to 1545. The





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very preachers who had, in loud proclamation, insisted that, under pain of punishment, every sick person must within three days summon a divine to his bedside, now, when one of their number had been attacked by the infection, allowed the sick in the lazaretto to perish without spiritual consolation. Vainly did the municipal authorities try to discover at least one member of the Consistory who would be willing "to visit and to console the unfortunate patients in the pest-hospital." No one volunteered except Castellio, rector of the school, who was not commissioned because he was not a member of the Consistory. Even Calvin got his colleagues to declare him "indispensable," openly insisting "it would not do to weaken the whole Church in order to help a part of it." The other preachers, who had not so important a mission as Calvin's, were equally careful to keep out of danger. Vain were the appeals of the Council to these timid shepherds, A critic said frankly of the preachers: "They would rather be hanged than go to the lazaretto." On June 5, 1543, all the preachers of the Reformed religion in Geneva, headed by Calvin, appeared at a meeting of the Council to make the shameful admission that not one of them was bold enough to enter the pest-hospital, although they knew it was appropriate to their office to serve God and the Church in evil days as well as in good.





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Now, nothing is more enheartening to the populace than a display of personal courage by its leaders. In Marseilles, in Vienna, and in many other towns, after the lapse of centuries the memory of the heroic priests who did their duty during the great epidemic is held in high honour. The common folk never forget such heroism on the part of their leaders; and are even less inclined to forget pusillanimity in the decisive hour. Scornfully did the Genevese watch, and make mock of, those divines who, from the pulpit, had been accustomed to demand the greatest sacrifices of their congregation, but were now neither ready nor willing to make any sacrifice at all. A vain attempt to allay popular discontent followed, an infamous spectacle being staged. By order of the Council, some destitute fellows were seized, and were tortured until they admitted having brought plague into the town by smearing the door-latches with an ointment prepared from devil's dung. Calvin, instead of contemptuously dismissing such a tale, showed his fundamental conservatism by heartily supporting the medieval delusion. He did himself even more harm by publicly declaring that the "*semeurs de peste*" had done their work abominably well, and by maintaining in the pulpit that, in the broad light of day, an atheist had been dragged out of bed by the devil and flung into the Rhone. For





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the first time in his experience, he had to endure the humiliation of noticing that many members of his congregations did not even try to hide their smiles.

Anyhow, a large part of the faith in Calvin's infallibility, the faith which is an indispensable psychological element of every dictator's power, vanished during the epidemic of plague. The enthusiasm with which his return had been welcomed was passing off; and a spirit of resistance spread in widening circles. It was Calvin's good fortune that they were widening circles, and that there was no concentration of hostility. Concentration has always been the temporal advantage of dictatorship, ensuring the persistence of a dictator's rule long after his active supporters have become no more than a minority. The militant will of these supporters manifests itself as an organized unity; whereas the contraposed wills, derived from various quarters and animated by various motives, rarely become assembled into an effective force. No matter that many are inspired with an inward revolt against dictatorship; if their hostility be not such as leads them to join in a unified movement for the carrying out of a common plan, their revolt is futile. Consequently, the period that elapses between the moment of the first challenge to a dictator's authority, and the moment of his even-





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tual overthrow, is usually a long one. Calvin, his Consistory, his preachers, and the refugees who formed the bulk of his supporters, represented a single block, a circumscribed will, a concentrated and clearly directed energy. The adversaries were recruited haphazard from all possible spheres and classes. Some of them had been Catholics and still clung in secret to the old faith; some of them were toppers against whom the doors of the inns had been closed; some of them were women who were not allowed to make up their faces as of yore; on the other hand, among the malcontents were members of illustrious patrician families, enraged at the rise of the penniless to power, at the rise of those who, within a few months of setting foot in Geneva, had been able to secure the most comfortable and most lucrative posts. Thus the opposition, though numerically strong, was composed both of the noblest and of the basest elements; and so long as malcontents cannot join forces in pursuit of an ideal, they can only murmur impotently, remaining potential energy instead of becoming kinetic. They are a mob against an army, unorganized disaffection against organized terror, and therefore make no headway. During these first years, Calvin found it easy to hold the scattered groups in leash. They never combined effectively against him, and he dealt with each group in isolation.





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The chief danger to an ideologist who has grasped the reins of power is a man who advocates a rival ideology. Calvin, a lucid thinker and ever on the alert, was quick to recognize this. The only opponents he seriously dreaded were those intellectually and morally his equals; and above all he feared Sebastian Castellio, who was certainly more than Calvin's equal intellectually and morally, and who rebelled with the ardour of a free spirit against the dictator's spiritual tyranny.

One portrait of Castellio has come down to us, and unfortunately it is a poor one. It shows a serious and thoughtful countenance, with candid eyes beneath a high, bold forehead. That is all the physiognomist can say. It does not grant us an insight into the depths of his character, and yet the man's most essential trait is unmistakably limned – his self-confidence and balance. If we place the portraits of Calvin and Castellio side by side, the opposition the two men were to manifest so decisively in the mental field is here plainly symbolized in the domain of the sensual. Calvin's visage is all tension, it expresses a convulsive and morbid energy, urgently and uncontrollably seeking discharge; Castellio's face is gentle and composed. The former displays fury and fret; the latter, serenity. We see impatience versus patience; impulsive





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zeal versus persistent resolution; fanaticism versus humanism.

We know almost as little about Castellio's youth as we do about his likeness. He was born in 1515, six years later than Calvin, in Dauphin, the borderland country between Switzerland, France, and Savoy. His family called itself Châteillon, Châtillon, or Châtaillon; under the Savoyard rule, perhaps Castellione or Castiglione. His mother tongue seems to have been French rather than Italian; though he spoke both fluently. Soon, his effective language was to be Latin, for, at the age of twenty, he entered the University of Lyons, acquiring there absolute mastery of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Subsequently he learned German as well. In all spheres of knowledge his zeal and his command were so outstanding that humanists and theologians unanimously voted him the most learned man of his day. Music attracted him, and it was by giving music lessons that he first earned a pittance. Then he wrote a number of Latin poems and prose works. Soon he was seized with a passion for the problems of his era, which seemed to him more fundamental than those of a remote classical past. If we consider humanism as a historical phenomenon, we find that the early phase of the movement, when the humanists gave most of their attention to the writings of the





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ancient Greeks and Romans, lasted for no more than a brief though glorious blossoming, during a few decades between the Renaissance and the coming of the Reformation. Only for this short space of time did the young look for deliverance to a revival, a renovation, thinking that systematized culture would redeem the world. Ere long, it became plain even to the devotees of classical lore, to the leaders of their generation, that valuable energy was being wasted in elaborating the texts of Cicero and Thucydides at a time when a religious revolution was affecting millions, and was devastating Germany like a forest fire. At the universities, there were more disputes about the old Church and the new than about Plato and Aristotle; professors and students studied the Bible instead of the Pandects. As in later times people have been engrossed by political, national or social movements, so, in the sixteenth century, all the young folk in Europe had an irresistible craving to think and talk about the religious ideals of the day, and to help in this great movement. Castellio was seized by the same passion, and a personal experience set the keynote for a man of his humane temperament. When, for the first time, in Lyons, he watched the burning of heretics, he was shaken to the depths of his soul, on the one hand by the cruelty of the Inquisition, and on the other, by the





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courage of the victims. Henceforward he resolved to live and fight for the new doctrine, which for him would involve the apotheosis of liberty.

It need hardly be said that from the moment when Castellio, then four-and-twenty years of age, decided to espouse the cause of the Reformation, his life was in danger. Wherever a State or a system forcibly suppresses freedom of thought, only three possibilities are open to those who cannot endure the triumph of violence over conscience. They can openly resist the reign of terror and become martyrs; this was the bold course chosen by Louis de Berquin and Etienne Dolet, and it led them to the stake; or, wishing to preserve internal freedom, and at the same time to save their lives, then malcontents can ostensibly submit, and conceal or disguise their private opinions; such was the technique of Erasmus and Rabelais, who outwardly kept peace with Church and State, and, wearing motley and a fool's cap, skilfully avoided the weapons of their adversaries, while shooting poisoned arrows from an ambush, cheating the brutalitarians with the cunning of an Odysseus. The third expedient is to become a refugee who endeavours to carry his own share of internal freedom out of the country in which freedom is persecuted and despised, to a foreign soil where it can flourish unhindered. Castellio, being of an upright but





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yielding nature, chose the peaceful path. In the spring of 1540, shortly after he had watched the burning of some of the early Protestant martyrs, he left Lyons and became a missionary on behalf of Protestant teaching.

He made his way to Strasburg, and, like most of these religious refugees, “*propter Calvinum*” – for Calvin’s sake. Inasmuch as Calvin, in the preface to his *Institutio*, had boldly challenged Francis I to show toleration and to permit freedom of belief; that author, though still quite a young man, came to be regarded by the inspired youth of France as herald and banner-bearer of evangelical doctrine. The refugees who had been persecuted like Calvin, hoped to learn from Calvin how to express their demands better, how to set their course more clearly, how to perform their life’s task. As a disciple and an enthusiastic one (for Castellio’s own enthusiasm for freedom made him regard Calvin as advocate of spiritual freedom), Castellio hastened to call on the latter in Strasburg, remaining for a week in the students’ hostel which Calvin’s wife had established in the city for these future missionaries of the new doctrine. Nevertheless the hoped-for intimacy could not immediately begin, for Calvin was soon summoned to the Councils of Worms and Hagenau. Thus the first contact profited neither. Yet it soon became plain that





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Castellio had produced a considerable impression upon Calvin; for hardly was the recall of the latter to Geneva decided on than, through Farel's recommendation, and unquestionably with Calvin's full assent, the youthful French or Savoyard scholar received a call to become teacher in the College of Geneva. Castellio was given the post of rector, two assistant teachers were placed under his direction, and he was also commissioned to preach in the church at Vandoeuvres, a suburb of Geneva.

Castellio justified this confidence, and his teaching activities secured for him a remarkable success. In order to facilitate the study of Latin, and to make it more attractive, Castellio translated and recast the most vivid episodes of the Old Testament and the New into Latin and French dialogues. Soon the little volume, which had been primarily designed as a *pons asinorum* for the youngsters of Geneva, became widely known throughout the world, and had a literary and pedagogic influence which was perhaps only equalled by that of Erasmus's *Colloquies*. For centuries the booklet was printed and reprinted, there having been no less than forty-seven editions; and through its pages hundreds of pupils learnt the elements of classical Latin. Although, among Castellio's humanist endeavours, the manual is no more than a parergon,





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a chance product, still, it was thanks to this book that he became a prominent figure.

Castellio's ambition was directed towards higher aims than the writing of a convenient and useful manual for school children. He had not renounced humanism in its familiar form in order to squander his energy and learning upon such petty tasks. The young idealist had the sublime intention to repeat and outclass the mighty deeds of Erasmus and Luther. He determined upon no less an undertaking than the translation of the entire Bible into Latin, and subsequently into French. His own people, the French, were to have the whole truth; as the humanist and German world had received the whole truth through Erasmus's and Luther's creative will. Castellio set himself to this gigantic task with characteristic tenacity and quiet confidence. Night after night he burned the midnight oil, although in the daylight hours he had to work hard for meagre pay in order to earn a subsistence for his family. Thus did he devote himself to carrying out a plan to which he intended to give up his life.

At the outset, however, Castellio encountered determined resistance. A Genevese bookseller had promised to print the first part of his Latin translation of the Bible, but Calvin was unrestricted

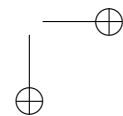




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dictator in Geneva as far as psychological and spiritual things were concerned. No book could be printed within the walls of the city without his *imprimatur*. Censorship is the inevitable sister of dictatorship.

Castellio called on Calvin, a theologian knocked at the door of another theologian, to ask for his colleague's endorsement. But persons of authoritarian nature always see their own will-to-power unpleasantly caricatured by any sort of independent thought. Calvin's immediate reaction was displeasure and scarcely concealed annoyance. He had written a preface for a relative's French translation of the Bible, recognizing this as, in a sort, the Vulgate, the officially valid vernacular Bible of Protestantism. How "presumptuous" of this young man, not to recognize that the version which Calvin had approved and collaborated in, was the only authorized French translation. Yet Castellio actually proposed to shove it aside and make a new version of his own. Calvin's irritability concerning his junior's impudence is shown by the following letter to Viret: "Just listen to Sebastian's preposterous scheme, which makes me smile, and at the same time angers me. Three days ago he called on me, to ask permission for the publication of his translation of the New Testament." The ironical tone shows that Calvin had taken Castellio's ri-





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valry much to heart. As a matter of fact, Calvin refused Castellio an unconditional *imprimatur*. He would grant permission only with the proviso that he himself was first to read the translation and make whatever corrections he thought expedient.

Nothing could be further from Castellio's nature than conceit or undue self-confidence. He never did what Calvin so often did – never proclaimed his opinion to be the only sound one, his outlook upon any matter to be flawless and incontestable. The preface he later wrote to this translation is a signal example of scientific and human modesty. He admitted frankly that he did not understand all the passages in Holy Writ, and therefore warned the reader against putting undue confidence in his (Castellio's) translation. The Bible was an obscure book, full of contradictions, and what the author of this new translation could offer was no more than an interpretation, not a certainty.

But though Castellio was able to contemplate his own work in a humble spirit, he regarded personal independence as a jewel beyond price. Aware that as a Hebraist, as a Greek scholar, as a man of learning, he was nowise inferior to Calvin, he rightly regarded this lofty kind of censorship, this authoritarian claim to "improve," as derogatory. In a free republic, scholar beside scholar, theologian beside theologian, he had no intention of sitting as pupil

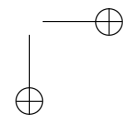




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at Calvin's feet, or of allowing his work to be blue-pencilled as a schoolmaster blue-pencils exercises. Wishing to find a way out of the difficulty without offending Calvin whom he greatly respected, he offered to read the manuscript aloud at any time that best suited Calvin, and declared himself ready to do his utmost to profit by Calvin's advice and proposals. But Calvin, as I have already said, was opposed to conciliation or compromise. He would not advise, but only command. He bluntly rejected Castellio's proposal. "I told him that even if he promised me a hundred crowns I should never be prepared to pledge myself to discussions at a particular moment, and then, perhaps, to wrangle for two hours over a single word. Thereupon he departed much mortified."

For the first time the blades had crossed. Calvin realized that Castellio was far from inclined to submit unprotestingly in spiritual and religious matters. Underneath the studied courtesy, he sensed the eternal adversary of every dictatorship, the man of independent mind. From this hour Calvin determined to seize the first opportunity for dislodging one who would serve his own conscience rather than obey another's orders. If possible, Castellio must be driven out of Geneva.





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He who seeks a pretext for his actions will always be able to find it. Calvin had not long to wait. Castellio, who had a large family, and was unable to meet expenses out of the starveling salary paid him at the College, aspired to the more congenial and better paid post of “preacher of God’s word.” Since the day when he fled from Lyons this had been his chief aim – to become a servant and expounder of evangelical doctrine. For months the distinguished theologian had been preaching in the church of Vandoeuvres, without rousing adverse criticism. Not another soul in Geneva could put forward so reasonable a claim to be appointed a member of the Protestant priesthood. In fact, Castellio’s application was supported by the town authorities, who, on December 15, 1543, passed a resolution unanimously to the effect: “Since Sebastian is a learned man and well fitted to be a servant of the church, we hereby command this appointment.”

But the town authorities had not taken Calvin into account. What? Without submitting the matter to their chief preacher they had ventured to appoint Castellio, one who, as a person of independent mind, might give Calvin trouble? Especially so since the appointment of preacher carried with it membership of the Consistory. Calvin instantly entered a protest, justifying his action in a letter to





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Farel by the obscure phrase: "There are important reasons against this appointment. To the Council I merely hinted at these reasons, without expressing them openly. At the same time, to avert erroneous suspicion, I was careful to make no attack on his reputation, being desirous to protect him."

When we read these obscure and mysterious words, a disagreeable suspicion creeps into the mind. How can we avoid thinking that there must be something against Castellio, something wrong with the man which unfits him for the dignity of preacher, some blot known to Calvin, but which Calvin wishes to conceal with the mantle of Christian charity in order to "protect" Castellio? What offence, we ask ourselves, can this highly respected scholar have committed – an offence which Calvin magnanimously conceals? Has he taken bribes from across the frontier; or has he cohabited with loose women? What secret aberrations underlie a repute which has hitherto been blameless? Plainly Calvin must have wished to surround Castellio with an atmosphere of vague suspicion; and nothing can be more disastrous to a man's reputation than such a "protective" ambiguity.

Sebastian Castellio, however, had no desire to be "protected." His conscience was clear; and as soon as he learned that there was an endeavour to get the appointment cancelled, he came out





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into the open, insisting that Calvin must publicly declare before the Town Council why his (Castellio's) appointment as preacher should be refused. Now Calvin was forced to show his colours, and to declare what had been Castellio's mysterious offence. Here it is, this crime Calvin had so delicately concealed. The error was the terrible one, as concerned two minor interpretations of the Scriptures, of having differed a little from Calvin. First of all Castellio had declared that the Song of Solomon was not a sacred but a profane poem. The pæan on the Shulamite, whose breasts "were like two fawns that were twins of a roe," is part of a secular love poem and is far from containing a glorificatory allusion to the Church. The second deviation was a matter equally trifling. Castellio had explained the descent of Jesus into hell in another sense than Calvin.

So unimportant seems the "magnanimously concealed" crime of Castellio, the offence because of which Castellio must be refused appointment as preacher. But, and this is the really important matter, for such a man as Calvin there are, in the doctrinal domain, no such things as trifles. To his orderly spirit, claiming, under the seal of his own authority, to establish supreme unity in the Church, an ostensibly trifling deviation is no less dangerous than gross error. In the logical edifice





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which he was building upon such consistent lines, every stone, and every smaller fragment, must be snugly fitted into its place; and as in political life, as in respect of customs and laws, so also in the religious sphere, he objected on principle to any kind of freedom. If his Church was to endure, it must remain authoritarian from its foundations to its topmost pinnacles; and there was no room in his State for one who refused to recognize his supreme leadership, or entertained liberal aspirations.

It was, therefore, a waste of pains for the Council to cite Castellio and Calvin to a public disputation, when they would furnish documentary warrants for their respective opinions. I cannot repeat too often that Calvin wished only to teach, being never willing to rally in support of another's teaching. He refused to discuss matters with any one, but merely dictated. In his first utterance upon this affair, he demanded that Castellio should "come over to our way of thinking;" and warned him against "trusting in his own judgment," which would conflict with the essential unity of the Church. Castellio, no less than Calvin, remained true to himself. For Castellio, freedom of conscience was man's supreme spiritual good, and on behalf of this freedom he was ready to pay any secular price. He knew that he need merely get the better of Calvin as regards these two unimportant details and that



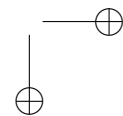


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thereupon a lucrative position in the Consistory would be open to him.

With unyielding independence, Castellio replied that nothing would induce him to make a promise he could not keep, since that promise would involve his acting in defiance of his conscience. A public disputation between Castellio and Calvin would therefore be futile. In their respective personalities, at this particular moment, the liberal Reformation, that of those who demanded for every one freedom in matters of religion, found itself faced by the orthodox Reformation. After this futile controversy with Castellio, Calvin was justified in writing: "As far as I have been able to judge from our conversations, he is a man who holds such opinions concerning me as to make it hard to believe that we can ever come to an understanding."

What sort of opinions had Castellio about Calvin? Calvin discloses this by writing: "Sebastian has got it into his head that I crave to dominate." How, indeed, could the actual position of affairs be more tersely and expressively stated? For two years Castellio had known what others would soon know, that Calvin, in accordance with his tyrannical impulses, would only tolerate in Geneva the opinions of one person, his own; and that no one





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could live within his sphere of spiritual influence, unless, like de Bèze and similar followers, he was prepared to be guided by Calvin in respect of every jot and tittle of doctrine. Now Castellio could not breathe this prison air, could not endure such spiritual coercion. He had not fled from France and escaped the Catholic Inquisition, in order to subordinate himself to a new, a Protestant control and supervision; he had not repudiated ancient dogma, in order to become the slave of a new dogma. Whereas Calvin regarded the gospels as a rigid and systematized legal code, for Castellio, Jesus was the most human of human beings, was an ethical prototype, to be imitated by every Christian disciple in his own way and to be humbly interpreted by the light of reason, without this implying the contention that one who put forward a new interpretation was the sole possessor of the truth. Castellio could not but be outraged to notice with what overweening confidence the preachers in Geneva were expounding the word of God, as if it had been so uttered as to be intelligible to themselves alone. He was exasperated by such opinionatedness, by the cocksureness of those who were continually insisting upon the sanctity of their calling, while speaking of all others as miserable sinners. When, at a public meeting, a comment was made upon the apostolic utterance:

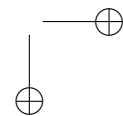




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“But in all things approve ourselves as the ministers of God, in great patience” – Castellio rose to his feet and asked “God’s messengers” to abide by the results of such an examination, instead of testing, punishing, and slaying those from whom they differed. Unfortunately we can only guess at the actual words used by Castellio from a study of the remarks as edited by Calvin – who had no scruples about altering even the sacred text when alteration was needed to get the better of an adversary. Still, even from Calvin’s biased description we can infer that Castellio, in his avowal of universal fallibility, included himself among the fallible; “Paul was one of God’s servants, whereas we serve ourselves. Paul was patient, but we are extremely impatient. Paul suffered injustice at the hands of others, but we persecute the innocent.”

Calvin, who was present at the aforesaid meeting, would seem to have been taken altogether by surprise by Castellio’s onslaught. A passionate and sanguine disputant, such a man as Luther, would have hastened to reply stormily; and Erasmus, a humanist, would most likely have argued learnedly and without too much heat. But Calvin was first, last, and all the time a realist; a man of tactics and practice; a man who knew how to curb his temperament. He was able to note how strong an impression Castellio’s words were having



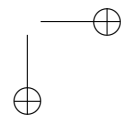


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on those present, and realized that the moment was inopportune for retaliation. So he made no rejoinder, narrowing his thin lips even more. "For the moment I held my peace," he says when he wishes to excuse himself for his strange reserve; "but only to avoid initiating a violent discussion before numerous foreigners."

What will he say later in more intimate circles? Will he expound his differences with Castellio, man against man, opinion against opinion? Will he summon Castellio before the Consistory, challenge his opponent, document general accusations with names and with facts? Not a bit of it. Calvin was never inclined to take a straightforward course in political matters. For him, every attempt at adverse criticism represented something more than a theoretical divergence of opinion; it was also an offence against the State, it constituted a crime. Now crimes must be dealt with by the secular arm. Castellio was summoned to appear, not before the Consistory but before the temporal authority; a moral dispute was transformed into a disciplinary procedure. His indictment, as laid before the Town Council in Geneva, ran: "Castellio has undermined the prestige of the clergy."

The Council was loth to consider this question. It had no love for quarrels among preachers. We cannot help thinking that the secular authority





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was uneasy about the Consistory's usurpation of power. The councillors postponed a decision for a considerable time, and their ultimate judgment proved ambiguous. Castellio was censured without being either punished or dismissed; but his activities as preacher in Vandoeuvres were suspended until further notice.

It might be thought that so lukewarm a reprimand would suffice Castellio. But he had made up his mind otherwise. This affair merely served to confirm his previous opinion that there was no room for a free spirit in Geneva under the dictatorship of a tyrant like Calvin. He therefore begged the Council to relieve him of his office. From this first trial of strength, and from his adversary's tactics, he had learned enough to know that political partisans deal arbitrarily with truth when they want what they call truth to serve their policy. Castellio plainly foresaw that his frank and manly rejection of office and dignity would only make his enemy spread hints that Castellio had lost his position for some sort of misconduct. Before leaving Geneva, therefore, Castellio demanded a written report about the affair. Calvin had no choice but to sign this report, which is still extant among State documents in the library at Basle. There we read that Castellio was refused appointment as preacher merely because of two theological devi-





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ations concerning matters of trifling importance. Here is the actual wording of the latter part of the report: "That no one may form a false idea of the reasons for the departure of Sebastian Castellio, we all declare that he has voluntarily resigned his position as rector at the College, and up till now performed his duties in such a way that we regarded him worthy to become one of our preachers. If, in the end, the affair was not thus arranged, this is not because any fault has been found in Castellio's conduct, but merely for the reasons previously indicated."

Calvin had certainly gained a victory by securing the expulsion from Geneva of the only man who could stand up against him; but this victory was indubitably Pyrrhic. Castellio was highly esteemed, and many regarded his departure as a serious loss to the city. It was publicly declared that "Calvin had done grave wrong to Master Castellio"; and throughout the cosmopolitan world of the humanists, it was generally held that Calvin would tolerate in Geneva none but those who said Aye to all his opinions. Two hundred years later, Voltaire mentioned the suppression of Castellio as a decisive proof of Calvin's attitude of mind. "We can measure the virulence of this tyranny by the persecution to which Castellio was exposed at



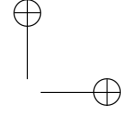
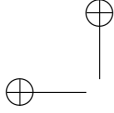


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Calvin's instance – although Castellio was a far greater scholar than Calvin whose jealousy drove him out of Geneva.”

Calvin's skin was unduly sensitive to criticism. He was quick to realize that public opinion was against him, that the general inclination was to make him responsible for Castellio's downfall. Hardly had he attained his end, and had directly been successful in expelling the only independent from Geneva, than he was troubled by the thought that Castellio's consequent poverty and hardships would be laid upon his (Calvin's) shoulders. In truth, Castellio's decision was made in desperation. As a declared opponent of the man who, politically speaking, was the mightiest Protestant in Switzerland, Castellio could not count on the likelihood of soon receiving another appointment in the Reformed Church; and his impetuous determination to leave, reduced him to penury. Hunger-stricken, the man who had been rector of the Genevese Reformed College was constrained to beg subsistence from door to door; and Calvin was keen witted enough to recognize that the manifest destitution of a vanquished rival would react upon his own head. Calvin, therefore, now that Castellio no longer annoyed him by proximity, tried to build a golden bridge for the hunted man's flight. At this juncture he must have spent a large propor-

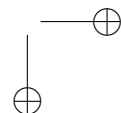
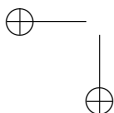




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tion of his time in writing letter after letter of self-exculpation, declaring what a lot of trouble he had taken in order to obtain for Castellio a suitable position – for Castellio the poor and needy. (Why was Castellio poor and needy except through Calvin’s fault?) “I wish that I could find satisfactory accommodation somewhere, and I would do anything I could to promote this.” But Castellio would not, as Calvin hoped, allow his mouth to be closed. He told all and sundry that he had been compelled to quit Geneva because of Calvin’s autocratic ways; thereby touching a very sore spot, for never would Calvin openly admit himself to be a dictator, but invariably described himself as one who modestly and humbly performed the difficult task that had been assigned to him.

Immediately there came a change in the tone of his letters to his friends, and he no longer sympathized with Castellio. “If you only knew,” he writes to one of his correspondents, “how this cur (I mean Sebastian Castellio) has yelped against me. He declares that he was expelled from office by my tyranny, and that I wished to be a supreme ruler.” In the course of a few months, the very man whom Calvin had described as worthy to occupy the sacred office of servant of the Lord, has become a “*bestia*,” a “cur” – merely because Castellio accepted extreme poverty rather than





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allow himself to be bought and silenced by the bestowal of prebends.

This heroic acceptance of poverty, voluntarily incurred, aroused admiration among Castellio's contemporaries. Montaigne said it was deplorable that a man who had done such good service as Castellio should have fallen upon evil days; and, added the French essayist, many persons would unquestionably have been glad to help Castellio had they known soon enough that he was in want. Montaigne was too sanguine. No one stirred a finger to spare Castellio the last extremities of want. Year followed year before the man who had been hounded out of his post could acquire one in the least accordant with his learning and moral superiority. For a long time no university gave him a call, no position as preacher was offered him, for the political dependence of the Swiss towns upon Calvin was already so great that no one ventured to do a good turn to the adversaries of the Genevese dictator. However, the hunted man was able to earn a pittance in a subordinate position as corrector of the press at the Basle printing house of Oporin; but the job was irregular, did not suffice to feed his wife and children as well as himself, so Castellio had to do overtime work as private tutor in order to nourish his dependants, six or





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eight in number. Years of want, during which his energies were paralysed, had to be endured before the university was at length to give this man of encyclopedic knowledge the position of lector in Greek. But this lectorship, more honourable than lucrative, was far from releasing Castellio from the pressure of unceasing toil. For years and years, while his life lasted, the great scholar (regarded by many as the greatest scholar of the day) had to do hodman's work. With his own hands he shovelled earth in a suburb of Basle; and since his daily labours did not suffice to feed his family, Castellio sat up all night correcting proofs, touching up the writings of others, translating from numberless languages. We can count by thousands the pages he translated from Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Italian, and German, for the Basle book printer – simply in order to secure daily bread.

By these years of deprivation, the strength of his weakly and over-sensitive body was undermined, but never would his independent and resolute spirit be impaired. For, amid these arduous labours, Castellio never forgot his true task. Indefatigably he continued his life's work, the translation of the Bible into Latin and French. In interludes he composed polemics, penned commentaries and dialogues. Not a day, not a night, passed in which Castellio did not remain hard at work. Never



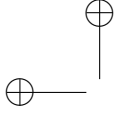


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was he to know the delights of travel, the joys of relaxation, nor even the sensual rewards of fame and wealth. But he would rather accept the gall of unceasing poverty, would rather forfeit his chances of sleep, than be untrue to his conscience. Thus he provides us with a magnificent example of the spiritual hero, who, unseen by the world and in the darkness of oblivion, struggles on behalf of what he regards as a holy of holies – the inviolability of his words, and his indestructible right to his own opinion.

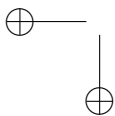
The real duel between Castellio and Calvin had not yet begun. But two men, two ideas, had contemplated one another, and each had recognized the other to be an irreconcilable opponent. They could not have lived for an hour in the same town, in the same spiritual area; but, although they were physically separated, one being in Basle and the other in Geneva, they kept a close watch on one another. Castellio did not forget Calvin, nor Calvin Castellio; and though they were silent about one another, it was only while waiting until the decisive word should be spoken. Such oppositions, which are something more than mere differences of opinion, being a primal feud between one philosophy and another, can never come to terms; never can spiritual freedom be at ease under the shadow of dictatorship; and never can a dictatorship be care-





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free and self-confident so long as one independent is afoot within its sphere of influence. But some special cause is requisite to rouse latent tensions to activity. Not until Calvin had the faggots fired to burn Servetus, did the words which had long been trembling on Castellio's lips find vent. Only when Calvin declared war against every one whose spirit was free, would Castellio declare, in the name of freedom of conscience, a life-and-death struggle against Calvin.





THE SERVETUS AFFAIR

From time to time, history seems to choose out of the millions one outstanding figure, as if to symbolize some peculiar philosophic outlook. Such a man need not be a genius of the first rank. Often destiny is satisfied to make a haphazard name conspicuous among many, which is thenceforward ineradicably impressed in the memories of our race. Thus Miguel Servetus was not a man of supreme intelligence, but his personality has been made ever memorable by his terrible fate. He had many gifts, multifarious talents, but they were ill-assorted and badly arranged. He had a powerful, alert, inquisitive, and stubborn mind, but he inclined to flit from one problem to another; his keen desire to unveil the truth was blunted by a lack of creative clarity. His Faustian intelligence never acquired a thorough knowledge of any science, although he





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studied them all. He was a freelance in philosophy, medicine, and theology, often dazzling the reader by his bold observations, but soon lapsing into quackery. Once, amid his prophetic revelations, he made a pioneer observation, announcing the medical discovery of the lesser or pulmonary circulation; but he never took the trouble to exploit his discovery, or to trace its relationships in the world of scientific achievement; so his flash of insight was a transitory gleam of illumination upon the dark visage of his century. He had much intellectual energy, though he was incapable of following his own lights, and nothing but the sustained endeavour to reach a goal can transform an able spirit into a creative genius.

It has become a commonplace to say that every Spaniard has some of the traits of a Don Quixote; but certainly the remark applies admirably to Miguel Servetus, the Aragonese. His physique was frail, his face pallid, with a beard trimmed to a point, so that outwardly he resembled the long, lean hero of La Mancha; while inwardly he was consumed by Don Quixote's splendid though grotesque craving to fight on behalf of the absurd, and to tilt blindly against the windmills of reality. Utterly devoid of the power of self-criticism, always making or believing himself to have made new discoveries, this knight errant of theology,





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lance in hand, rode furiously against all possible obstacles. Nothing but adventure could stimulate him; nothing but the absurd, the preposterous, the dangerous; and he laid about him contentiously, exchanging shrewd blows with those who differed from him as to what was right or wrong, never joining a party or belonging to a clan, the eternal solitary, imaginative in the good sense and fanciful in the bad – and always unique and eccentric.

Being thus puffed up with conceit, a man everlastingly ready to do battle, it was inevitable that he should raise up adversaries wherever he went. Still, his student days, first at Saragossa, and then at Toulouse, were comparatively peaceful. Charles V's confessor, making his acquaintance at the University of Toulouse, carried him off as private secretary to Italy and subsequently took him to the Augsburg Diet. There the young humanist, like most of his contemporaries, succumbed to the prevailing passion as far as the great religious dispute was concerned. The ferment of the conflict between the old doctrine and the new set to work in him. Where all were combative, this contentious fellow must be combative like the rest; where so many were eager to reform the Church, he must have a hand in the game; and he considered, in his haste and heat, that every previous departure from the teachings and solutions of the ancient Church,





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had been timid, lukewarm, indecisive. Even such able innovators as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, were not revolutionary enough for him in their cleansing of the gospels, for they had not broken away from the dogma of the Trinity. Servetus, with the uncompromising spirit of youth, declared, at twenty years of age, that the Council of Nicæa had decided wrongly, and that the dogma of the three eternal hypostases was incompatible with the unity of the divine nature.

So radical a view was not anything remarkable in that period when the currents of religious excitement ran high. Whenever values are being revalued and laws are being restated, people claim for themselves the right of breaking away from tradition and of thinking independent thoughts. What was disastrous to Servetus was that he took over from the quarrelsome theologians, not only their fondness for debate, but also their worst quality, their fanatical and dogmatical disputatiousness. He was eager to show the leaders of the Reformation that their remoulding of the ecclesiastical doctrines had been wholly inadequate, and that he, Miguel Servetus, was alone acquainted with the truth. He hastened to visit the greatest scholars of the day – in Strasburg, Martin Bucer and Capito; in Basle, Oecolampadius – to urge them to make short work, as far as the Evangel-





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ical Church was concerned, with the “erroneous” dogma of the Trinity. The reader can imagine the fury and disgust of these dignified and mature preachers and professors, when a Spanish greenhorn forced his way into their houses, and, with the uncontrol of a vigorous but hysterical temperament, insisted that they instantly modify their views and unhesitatingly adopt his revolutionary thesis. They felt as if the devil himself had sent one of his minions, and they crossed themselves to exorcise this fanatical heretic. Oecolampadius drove him away as he would have driven away a rabid dog, declaring him to be a “Jew, Turk, blasphemer, and a man possessed.” Bucer, from his pulpit, denounced Servetus as a child of the devil. Zwingli expressly warned his adherents against this “criminal Spaniard, whose false and evil doctrine, would, if it could, sweep away our whole Christian religion.”

But, just as little as the knight of La Mancha was to be cured of his delusions by abuse or violence, just so little would this quixotic theologian listen to argument or accept reproof. If the leaders could not understand him, if the wise and the prudent would not listen to him in their studies, then he must carry on his campaign among the public at large. The whole Christian world should read his theses. He would publish a book. At two-and-





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twenty, Servetus gathered together the last of his funds, and had his views printed at Hagenau (*De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem*, 1531). Thereupon the storm broke. Bucer did not hesitate to say that the rascal deserved “to have the guts torn out of his living body”; and throughout the Protestant world Servetus from this hour was considered to be nothing more nor less than an emissary of Satan.

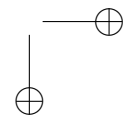
It need hardly be said that one who had assumed so provocative an attitude, who had declared both Catholic and Protestant doctrines to be false, could no longer find a resting-place among Christians, or discover a roof beneath which he could lay his head. From the time when Miguel Servetus had, in cold type, been guilty of espousing the “Arian heresy,” he was hunted like a wild beast. Nothing could save him but disappearance from the scene, and the adoption of an alias, since his name was in such evil odour. He therefore returned to France as Michel de Villeneuve, and, under this fancy appellation, secured work as proof corrector to the Brothers Trechsel in Lyons. In this new sphere of life, his amateurish but strongly imaginative insight soon found fresh stimulus and other polemic possibilities. When correcting the proofs of an edition of Ptolemy’s geography, Servetus, betwixt night and morning, transformed himself into a professional geographer, and provided the work with a





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detailed introduction. Again, when he was revising the proofs of medical books, his mobile mind became that of a doctor, and ere long, he did actually devote himself to the study of medicine. Removing to Paris with this end in view, he worked beside Vesalius upon the preparation of dissections and gave anatomical lectures. But here likewise, as before in the field of theology, the impatient man, ere he had completed his studies and had been granted a medical degree, began to teach others and tried to excel his competitors. Then, in the medical school at Paris, he announced that he was going to give lectures on mathematics, meteorology, astronomy, and astrology; but the physicians at the university were exasperated at this mishmash of astrology with the healing art, and they took some of his quackeries amiss. Servetus-Villanovus fell into disfavour with the authorities; and the Parliament of Paris received a complaint that he was doing much mischief with his “judicial astrology,” a science condemned both by divine and mundane laws. Once more Servetus saved himself by flight, although not before the identity of “Michel de Villedeneuve” with the wanted heretic Miguel Servetus, had been disclosed. Still, Villanovus the instructor quitted Paris as inconspicuously as Servetus the theologian had previously quitted Germany. For a long time nothing was heard of him; and





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when he cropped up again he was wearing a new mask. Who would suspect that Pierre Paulmier, Archbishop of Vienne, could have engaged as his physician in ordinary one who had been outlawed as a heretic and condemned by the Parlement of Paris as a charlatan? Anyhow Michel de Villeneuve was careful, in Vienne, to abstain from enunciating heretical theses. He sang small and remained inconspicuous; he visited and cured many of the sick; he earned considerable sums of money; and the wealthy burghers of Vienne raised their hats whenever, with Spanish grandeza, Monsieur le docteur Michel de Villeneuve, physician in ordinary to his archiepiscopal eminence, encountered them in his walks abroad. "What a distinguished, pious, learned, and modest man!"

Truth to tell, the arch-heretic was by no means dead in this passionate and impatient Spaniard. Miguel Servetus was still animated by the old spirit of inquiry and unrest. When an idea has taken possession of a man, he is as if stricken by a fever. His ideals acquire independent vitality, seeking expansion and liberty. Inevitably to every thinker comes the hour when some leading notion seeks exit as irresistibly as a splinter seeks issue from a suppurating finger, as a child seeks to come forth from the mother's womb, as a swelling





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fruit seeks to burst its shell. A man as passionate and self-assertive as Servetus will not, in the long run, endure the constraint of thinking his leading thoughts solely for himself; he craves irresistibly to compel the world to think with him. For Servetus it was a daily torment to see how the Protestant leaders continued to promulgate what he regarded as the erroneous dogmas of infant baptism and the Trinity; how Christendom was still contaminated by “anti-Christian” errors. Was it not his duty to come into the open and proclaim his mission on behalf of the true faith? We cannot doubt that Servetus must have suffered spiritual agonies during these years of enforced silence. The unspoken message rioted within him, and, as an outlaw and one for whose safety it was essential that he should remain invisible, he was compelled to keep his mouth shut. Servetus at length decided to find a sympathetic correspondent with whom to carry on intellectual converse. Since, in his present home, he could not venture to discuss his theological convictions with any one by word of mouth, he would discuss them secretly in writing.

The disastrous thing for Servetus was that, in his blindness, he pitched upon Calvin as a theologian worthy of his confidence; hoping that this bold and revolutionary innovator would be ready to sympathize with even bolder interpretations of Holy Writ.





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It may be that in approaching Calvin, Servetus was merely renewing an old acquaintanceship, and resuming a conversation begun long before. As undergraduates they had certainly met in Paris; but it was not until Calvin had become master of Geneva, and until Michel de Villeneuve was physician in ordinary to the Archbishop of Vienne, that, through the intermediation of Jehan Frellon, scholar and publisher in Lyons, correspondence was opened between the pair. The initiative came from Servetus. With urgency, nay with importunacy, he applied to Calvin, hoping to win for his anti-Trinitarian theses the support of the most outstanding theoretician of the Reformation. With this end in view, Servetus wrote letter after letter. Calvin's answers were at first only in the tone of one who corrects errors in dogma. Believing it to be his duty to lead back into the true path those who had strayed, to guide wandering sheep into the true fold, Calvin did his best to convince Servetus of error. But at length, he grew irritated at the overbearing and presumptuous tone used by Servetus. Assuredly to write to Calvin, authoritarian, opinionated, and prone to become splenetic at the slightest contradiction: "I have often explained to you that you are on the wrong path in disregarding the vast differences between the three divine essences," was to touch a dan-





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gerous adversary on the raw. But when Servetus at length dared to send the distinguished author of the *Institutio religionis Christianae* a copy of that book in which, like a master dealing with a schoolboy's composition, the Spaniard had marked the supposed errors in the margin, it is easy to understand how wrathful must have been the Genevese dictator at such arrogance on the part of an amateur theologian. "Servetus seizes my books and defiles them with abusive remarks much as a dog bites a stone and gnaws it," wrote Calvin contemptuously to his friend Farel. Why should he waste his time disputing with such an incurable idiot? He rids himself of Servetus's arguments with a kick. "I care as little for this fellow's words as I care for the heehaw of a donkey (*le hin-han d'un âne*)."

The unlucky Don Quixote, instead of perceiving before it was too late against what an armour-plate of self-satisfaction he was tilting with his slender lance, returned to the charge. Calvin, who will have nothing to do with him, is the very man whom, above all others, he wants to convince. It almost seemed as if Servetus, to quote Calvin's words, had been "possessed by the devil." Instead of fighting shy of Calvin as the most formidable of possible opponents, Servetus sent to Calvin the proofs of a work of his own which had not yet issued

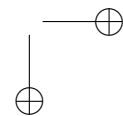




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from the press, a theological book, whose very title was enough to enrage Calvin. For Servetus had named his work *Christianismi Restitutio*, in order to demonstrate to the world that Calvin's *Institutio* must be counterblasted by a *Restitutio*. For Calvin, the morbid controversialist's craving to convert him, and the Spaniard's importunacy, were now too much. He wrote to inform Frelon, the bookseller who had acted as intermediary in this correspondence, saying that he (Calvin) had a better use for his time than to read the letters of such an inflated idiot. Simultaneously, he penned words which were subsequently to be of terrible moment. Here is what he wrote to Farel: "Servetus wrote to me lately, and beside his letter sent me a great volume full of his ravings, maintaining with incredible presumption in the letter that I shall there find things stupendous and unheard of till now. He declares himself ready to come hither if I wish him to; but I shall not pledge my faith to him; for if he did come here, I would see to it, in so far as I have authority in this city, that he should not leave it alive."

We do not know whether Servetus was informed of this threat; or whether (in a lost letter) Calvin may have given him an obscure warning. Certainly the Spaniard seems at length to have re-





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alized that he had roused in Calvin a spirit of murderous hatred. For the first time he became uneasy about the manuscript which he had sent Calvin "*sub sigillo secreti*"; for it might prove disastrous that this document was in the hands of one who so openly expressed hostility. "Since you opine," wrote Servetus to Calvin in alarm, "that I am a Satan, I propose to go no further. Send me back my manuscript and may all be well with you. But if you honestly believe the Pope to be Antichrist, you must also be convinced that the Trinity and infant baptism, which are parts of papistical doctrine, are devilish dogmas."

Calvin made no reply. He had no intention of sending Servetus's manuscript back to the author, but put the heretical writing carefully away in a drawer, where he could lay his hand on it whenever he should need it. For both the contending parties knew, after the acrimony of their last utterances, that a fiercer struggle was inevitable; and, his mind full of gloomy anticipations, Servetus wrote at this time to a theologian: "It is now perfectly plain to me that I am doomed to suffer death in this cause, but the thought cannot shake my courage. As one of Jesus' disciples, I shall advance in the footsteps of my master."

Castellio and Servetus and a hundred others had occasion to learn that it is extremely dangerous to





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contradict so fanatical a dogmatist as Calvin, or to challenge such a man even upon minor points of doctrine. In these respects, Calvin was true to type, being rigid and methodical. He did not succumb to outbursts of passion, as did Luther, the berserk, or to the churlishness which was characteristic of Farel. His hatred was as harsh, as sharp, as incisive, as a rapier: not deriving, like Luther's from the blood, from temperament, from passion, or from spleen. Calvin's tenacious and cold rancour sprang from brain, and his hatred had a terribly good memory. Calvin never forgot. De la Mare, the pastor, wrote of him: "*quand il a la dent contre quelqu'un ce nest jamais fait.*" A name once inscribed upon the tablets of his memory would remain indelible until the man himself had been erased from the Book of Life. Thus it mattered not that several years would elapse during which Calvin heard no more of Servetus. Calvin continued to bear Servetus in mind. The compromising documents lay silent in the drawer where they had been put for safe keeping; arrows were ready in his quiver; hatred smouldered in his inexorable soul.

For years Servetus made no move. He gave up the attempt to convince a man who was unteachable, devoting himself passionately to his work. With the most touching devotion, the arch-





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bishop's physician in ordinary toiled in secret at his *Christianismi Restitutio*, a book which would, he hoped, effect a reformation enormously superior to Calvin's, Luther's and Zwingli's. It would be true where their reformations had been false. Servetus's reformation was to redeem the world by the diffusion of genuine Christianity. For Servetus was never that "cyclopean despiser of the gospel" that Calvin in later days pilloried; and still less was he the bold freethinker and atheist whom those that believe themselves to be his followers sometimes extol to-day. Servetus always kept on the rails in religious matters. How earnestly he regarded himself as a pious Christian who must be prepared to stake his life for faith in the divine, is shown by the appeal in the preface to his book. "O Jesu Christe, Son of God, thou which art given us from heaven, reveal thyself to thy servant, that so great a revelation may become truly clear to us. It is thy cause which I, following an inward divine urge, have undertaken to defend. In former years I made a first attempt. Now, since the times are fulfilled, I am constrained to do so anew. Thou hast instructed us not to hide our light under a bushel. Woe unto me if I fail to proclaim the truth!"

The precautions taken by Servetus in the type-setting of this book show that the author was well aware of the dangers he was conjuring up by its

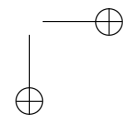




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publication. What a desperate undertaking for one who was physician in ordinary to an archbishop to issue, in a gossipy provincial town, a heretical book running to seven hundred pages. Not only the author, but also the publisher and the distributors, were staking their lives upon this foolhardy venture. Yet Servetus gladly devoted all that he had saved during his practice as physician to fire his hesitating collaborators. It was thought expedient to remove the printing press from its usual place to a remote house rented by the author solely for this purpose. There, in defiance of the Inquisition, the heretical theses were set up and printed by trustworthy persons who swore to guard the secret. The finished volume contained no sign to show where it had been printed or published. Servetus, however, disastrously for himself, left in the colophon, over the date, the identifying initials M.S.V. (Miguel Servetus Villanovus), thus giving the bloodhounds of the Inquisition an irrefutable proof of authorship.

Still, it was a work of supererogation for Servetus to betray himself thus, since his ruthless adversary, though apparently slumbering, was in reality kept awake by the spur of hatred. The elaborate organization for espionage which Calvin had established in Geneva – a network whose meshes grew continually finer – extended its operations into neighbour-





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ing lands, being in France even more effective than was the Holy Inquisition. Before Servetus's book had been actually published, when the thousand volumes were still warehoused in Lyons or were on their way to the Frankfort book-fair, when so few individual copies had been distributed that to-day only three have come down to us, Calvin was already in possession of one. The Genevese dictator at once addressed himself to the task of annihilating with a single stroke both the heretic and his writings.

Not many people are aware that Calvin opened his campaign against Servetus by a furtive attempt at "liquidation" of an adversary which was even more repulsive than the subsequent success on the plateau of Champel. For if, after the perusal of what he naturally regarded as an extremely heretical book, Calvin wanted to thrust his opponent into the clutches of the Inquisition, he might have chosen an open and honest way. It would have sufficed for him, from the pulpit, to warn Christendom against the book, and the familiars of the Inquisition would have discovered the author of this wicked work even though he lived within the shadow of the archiepiscopal palace. But the great reformer saved the papal authorities the trouble of looking for Servetus, and did so in the most perfidious way. Vainly do Calvin's apologists seek





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to defend him even in this; their attempts throw a most sinister light upon his character. Calvin, who in his personal behaviour was an honest zealot and a man animated by profoundly religious intentions, became unscrupulous whenever his doctrine was impugned, or when the “cause” seemed to him at stake. For his dogma, for his party, he was ready (like Loyola) to approve any means that were effective. Almost as soon as Servetus’s book was in his hands, one of Calvin’s intimates, a French refugee named Guillaume Trie, wrote from Geneva, in February, 1553, to a cousin, Antoine Arneys – as fanatical a Catholic as he himself was a fanatical Protestant. In this letter Trie began by describing in general terms how effectively Protestant Geneva suppressed heretical intrigues, whereas in Catholic France these weeds were allowed to grow rankly. Then, what had opened as friendly chaff suddenly grew serious. In France, for instance, there was a heretic who ought to be burned the instant the authorities could lay hands on him (“*qui mérite bien d’être brulé partout où il sera*”).

Can we fail to be reminded of Calvin’s “if he did come here, I would see to it. . . that he should not leave the city alive”? But Trie, Calvin’s henchman, wrote even more plainly, disclosing the miscreant’s name: “I refer to an Aragonese Spaniard, whose real name is Miguel Servetus, but who calls himself





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Michel de Villeneuve, and practises as a physician"; and he went on to give the title of Servetus's book, the table of contents, and a transcript of the first four pages. He concluded his letter with a lamentation concerning the sinfulness of the world.

This Genevese mine was skilfully laid to explode in the right place. Everything worked out as the informer had designed. The pious Catholic Arneys, beside himself with indignation, hurried off to show the letter to the ecclesiastical authorities of Lyons; and with equal speed the cardinal betook himself to the papal Inquisitor, Pierre Ory. The stone thus set rolling by Calvin reached the bottom of the hill with frightful momentum. The denunciation was sent from Geneva on February 27th, and on March 16th Michel de Villeneuve was formally accused at Vienne.

It must have been a great disappointment to the zealous informers in Geneva that, after all, their mine missed fire. Some helpful person must have cut the fuse. Probably the archbishop of Vienne gave his physician in ordinary a timely hint. When the Inquisitor appeared in Vienne, the printing press had mysteriously disappeared; the journeyman printers solemnly swore that they had never set up or printed any such work; and the highly respected physician Villanovus indignantly repudiated his alleged identity with Miguel Serve-





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tus. Strangely enough, the Inquisition was content with having made a protest, and the remarkable forbearance of this terrible institution strengthens our belief that some powerful person must have extended a protective hand over the culprit. The ecclesiastical court, which usually began its work with the thumb-screw and the rack, left Villeneuve at large; the Inquisitor returned to Lyons, having effected nothing; and Arneys was informed that his accusation had proved unfounded. The Genevese attempt to get rid of Servetus by setting the Inquisition to work proved a failure. It is possible that the whole matter would have come to nothing had not Arneys applied to Geneva, begging his cousin Trie to supply additional and more damnatory material concerning the aforesaid heretic.

Up to now it might seem possible to suppose, if we wish to take a lenient view, that Trie acted on his own initiative in thus lodging a charge with his Catholic cousin about an author with whom he had no personal acquaintance; and that neither he nor Calvin had dreamed that their denunciation would leak through to the papal authorities. But now, when the machine of justice had been set in motion, and when the group of zealots in Geneva must know that Arneys was writing to them for further information, not in idle curiosity, but under promptings from the Inquisition, they could





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not doubt the nature of the springes they were setting. Surely an evangelical pastor would shrink from playing the part of informer to the terrible authority which had roasted so many Protestants over a slow fire? But Servetus had good reason for thundering at Calvin: "Do you not realize that it ill becomes a servant of the gospel to make himself an official accuser, and to take advantage of his official position in order to set snares?"

Calvin, let me repeat, was unscrupulous when his doctrine was at stake. Servetus must be "liquidated"; and since Calvin was a good hater, he cared not a jot what means were employed. Nothing could have been more shameful than these means. Trie's second letter to Arneys, unquestionably dictated by Calvin, was a masterpiece of hypocrisy. The writer declared himself greatly astonished that his cousin had handed over the letter to the Inquisition. "It was intended only for your eye," he said. "I had no other object than to give you a demonstration how little zeal for the faith have those who style themselves pillars of the Church." But now, when he knew that the faggots had already been piled, instead of repudiating the idea of further activity on the part of the Inquisition, this contemptible informer went on to say unctuously that, since the mistake had already been made, there could be no doubt "God pur-





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poses to rid Christendom of this foul and deadly plague.” What followed seems unbelievable. After dragging God’s name in to cover an inhuman manifestation of human hatred, Trie sent his cousin the most compromising material he could find: letters penned by Servetus’s own hand together with portions of the manuscript of the book. Now those who were to take sharp measures against a heretic could get quickly to work.

Letters in Servetus’s own handwriting were sent. How did Trie, who had never corresponded with Servetus, get hold of such letters? There is no possibility of glossing over this matter. We must bring Calvin, who wanted to remain in the background, out into the limelight. Servetus’s letters, and some pages of the manuscript work, were those sent by Servetus to Calvin; and Calvin knew perfectly well for what purpose he took them out of his drawer. He knew to whom the documents would be sent; to those very “papists” against whom, from the pulpit, he daily fulminated as “Satan’s spawn,” and who were in the habit of torturing and burning his own disciples. He could not but know that the documents were needed to bring Servetus to the stake.

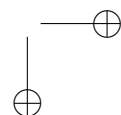
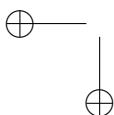
Vainly, therefore, did he subsequently endeavour to cover up his tracks, writing sophistically, “It is rumoured that I took steps to secure the arrest of





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Servetus by the familiars of the Inquisition; and some even say that it was dishonourable of me to hand him over to the deadly enemies of our faith and to fling him into the wolf's jaws. Let me ask my accusers how I could have suddenly got into touch with the pope's satellites. It is surely incredible that I could have any such associations, and that those who are to me as Belial was to Christ could have joined with me in a conspiracy." But the evasion is too palpable; for when Calvin asks naively, "How could I have suddenly got into touch with the pope's satellites?" the documents provide a clear and crushing answer. It was through the instrumentality of his friend Trie, who, in his letter to Arneys, frankly avows Calvin's collaboration. "I must admit that only with great pains was I able to secure from Monsieur Calvin the documents I enclose. I do not mean to imply that he is not convinced measures must be taken to suppress such abominable blasphemy, but that he considers it his duty to convince heretics by sound doctrine and not to attack them with the sword of Justice." Fruitless, therefore, is the attempt (manifestly at Calvin's instigation) of this clumsy correspondent to avert blame from the real offender, writing: "I was so importunate as to declare that if Monsieur Calvin would not help me, the reproach of bringing an unwarrantable charge would attach to



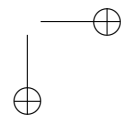


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me, unless he handed over to me the confirmatory material I enclose.”

Actions are more impressive than words. Reluctantly or not, Calvin delivered over Servetus’s private letters to the “pope’s satellites,” that they might be used for the destruction of their author. Calvin, and Calvin alone, was responsible for Trie’s letter to Arneys (really a letter addressed to the Inquisition); Calvin alone enabled Trie to enclose the incriminatory material and to conclude his letter to Arneys with the following words: “I think I am sending you some irrefutable proofs, so that you will have no further difficulty in getting Servetus arrested and brought to trial.”

It is on record that Cardinal de Tournon and Grand Master Ory burst into uproarious laughter when these irrefutable proofs of Servetus’s guilt were forced upon their attention by their deadly enemy, the heretic Calvin. Indeed it is easy to understand why the princes of the Church were so delighted. Pious excuses might hide from us that Trie’s motives were anything other than goodness of heart and gentleness and loyalty to his friend – but they cannot hide the preposterous fact that the leader of Protestantism was so accommodating as to help Catholic Inquisitors (of all persons) to burn a heretic. Such courtesies were not usually exchanged between the notables of the respective





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faiths, who, throughout the globe, were accustomed to use fire and sword, the gallows and the wheel, in the attempt to destroy one another. Anyhow, after this mirthful interlude, the Inquisitors devoted themselves to their task. Servetus was arrested and stringently examined. The letters and the fragments of manuscript supplied by Calvin furnished such overwhelming proofs, that the defendant could no longer deny the authorship of the book, or that Michel de Villeneuve and Miguel Servetus were one and the same person. His cause was lost. The faggots were piled in Vienne, and soon the flames would rage.

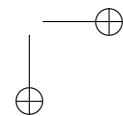
For the second time, however, it appeared that Calvin's hope to rid himself of his arch-enemy by summoning other arch-enemies to his aid, was premature. Either Servetus, having made himself beloved as physician, possessed influential friends, or else (which is more probable) the ecclesiastical authorities preferred to be weary in well-doing for the very reason that Calvin was so eager to send this man to the stake. Anyhow, the gaolers were lax. Would it not be better to let an unimportant heretic escape than to please the heretic-in-chief in Geneva? Servetus was not closely guarded. The usual practice as regards heretics was to keep them in narrow cells, chained to the wall. Servetus enjoyed exceptional treatment. He was allowed to





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go for a walk in the garden every day, that he might breathe the fresh air. On April 7th, during one of these walks, the prisoner vanished, leaving for the head-gaoler nothing but a dressing-gown and the ladder by means of which the fugitive had climbed over the garden wall. Still, the faggots were not wasted, for, instead of the living Servetus, his effigy and five packages of the *Restitutio* were burned in the market-place at Vienne. The Genevese plan of using the hands of foreign fanatics to rid themselves of a foe, while they kept their own hands clean, had proved a fiasco. Henceforward Calvin would be an object of scorn in the eyes of all humane persons. He would have to accept full responsibility for continuing his campaign against Servetus, and for contriving a man's death for the sole reason that he detested the man's convictions.





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For some months after his escape from prison, Servetus vanished without leaving a trace. It is unlikely that we shall ever learn what sufferings the hunted man endured until that August day when, upon a hired hack, he rode into Geneva, and put up at the Rose. Nor are we likely to find out why Servetus, prompted by an evil star (*“malis auspiciis appulsus”*), should have sought refuge in Geneva. Was it his intention to stay one night, and continue his flight by taking boat across the lake? Did he perhaps expect to conciliate his greatest enemy at a personal interview, since correspondence was unavailing? Or, perhaps, was his journey to Geneva one of those foolish actions characteristic of individuals whose nerves are overstrained; one of the pleasurable toyings with danger not infrequent in persons whose situation is desperate? We





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do not know; probably we never shall know. None of the official reports of what happened in Geneva explains why Servetus came to the place where he could only expect the worst from Calvin.

But the unhappy fugitive did something even more foolish, more challenging. Almost immediately after his arrival, on the same Sunday morning, August 13, 1553, Servetus attended service at the cathedral of St. Pierre, where the whole Calvinist congregation was assembled, and where Calvin was to preach, Calvin, who could recognize Servetus, because the two had been students together long before in Paris. No reasonable explanation of such conduct is possible, save that some mysterious compulsion, a fascination like that which brings a serpent's victims to their doom, must have been at work.

It was inevitable, in a town where every one spied on every one else, that a stranger should be the cynosure of all eyes. What ensued was likewise inevitable. Calvin recognized the ravaging wolf among his pious flock, and inconspicuously gave orders to his minions. Servetus was arrested as he left the cathedral. Within an hour the fugitive was in chains. This arrest was a breach of international law, and also of the laws of hospitality generally accepted throughout the world. Servetus was not subject to Genevese jurisdiction, unless for an of-





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fence committed in that city. He was a foreigner, a Spaniard, who had only just arrived, and who had committed no crime which could justify his seizure. His books had been written and printed across the frontier, so that his heretical views could not have harmed any of the pious Genevese. Besides, a “preacher of God’s word” had no right to order a man to be arrested and chained when no charge had been brought, and when no trial had taken place. From whatever angle we regard the matter, Calvin’s seizure of Servetus was an outrageous exercise of dictatorial power, which, in its open contempt of laws and treaties, can only be compared to Napoleon’s arrest and murder of the Duc d’Enghien. In this case, as in that, the arrest was to be followed, not by a properly constituted trial, but by an illegal homicide.

Servetus was arrested and thrown into prison without any charge having been brought against him. Surely then a charge must subsequently be invented? Would it not be logical to expect that the man who had instigated the arrest – “*me auctore*,” “at my instigation,” is Calvin’s own admission – should himself come forward as Servetus’s accuser? But the laws of Geneva were exemplary, and gave little encouragement to informers. They prescribed that any burgher who accused another of a crime





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should himself be arrested, and should be kept in prison until he had justified his accusation. Calvin, therefore, if he accused Servetus, would have to place himself at the disposal of the court. The theocratic dictator of Geneva did not relish the prospect. He would be in an unfortunate position if the Town Council were to declare Servetus not guilty, and if he himself were to remain under arrest for having brought an unjustifiable charge. What a blow that would be to his prestige, and what a triumph for his adversary. Calvin, diplomatic as ever, assigned to his secretary – or cook – Nicolaus de la Fontaine, the thankless task of accuser. The worthy Nicolaus went quietly to prison instead of his master, after he had handed the authorities an indictment consisting of twenty-three points (a document compiled, of course, by Calvin). Such was the comedy which served as curtain-raiser to a horrible tragedy. After a gross breach of law, the affair was given a legal complexion. Servetus was examined, and the various counts of the indictment were read aloud to him. His answers were calm and shrewd, for his energies had not yet been undermined by long imprisonment. Point by point, he rejected the accusations. For instance, in answer to the charge that he had attacked Calvin in his writings, Servetus declared this to be erroneous, for the attack had opened on Calvin's side,





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and all that he, Servetus, had done was to reply that Calvin was not infallible. If Calvin accused him of obstinately sticking to certain theses, he could rejoin that Calvin was no less stubborn. All that was at odds between Calvin and himself was a difference of opinion about certain theological matters, with which a secular court had no concern; and if Calvin had nevertheless arrested him, this had been the outcome of spite. The leader of Protestantism had denounced him to the Inquisition, and if this preacher of God's word had had his way, he (Servetus) would have been burned long ago.

The legality of Servetus's contentions was so indubitable that the prevailing mood of the Council was very much in his favour, and it seemed likely that there would be no harsher decision than the issue of an order for deportation. Calvin, however, got wind of the fact that things were going well for Servetus, and he feared that in the end his victim might give him the slip. On August 17th, the dictator appeared before the Town Council and took a line which made an end of the pretence of non-participation. He showed his colours, no longer denying that he was Servetus's accuser; and he begged leave of the Council to attend the proceedings henceforward, on the pretext that "thus the accused could be better convinced of his er-





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rors.” Calvin’s real reason obviously was the wish to throw his whole influence into the scale in order to prevent his victim’s escape.

From the moment when Calvin autocratically thrust himself in between the accused and the judges, Servetus’s cause was lost. Calvin, a trained logician and learned jurist, was much more competent to press home the charge than his servant de la Fontaine had been; and Servetus’s confidence was shaken. The Spaniard was obviously unmanned now that his enemy sat among the judges, cold, severe, making a pretence of dispassionateness, as he asked one question after another – but, as Servetus felt in the marrow of his bones, moved by an iron determination to send the accused to doom. The defenceless man grew irritable, nervous, aggressive, bitter, and wrathful. Instead of tranquilly sticking to his legal standpoint, instead of insisting that as a foreigner he was not subject to Genevese jurisdiction unless he had broken the laws of the town, he allowed Calvin to entice him on to the treacherous ground of theological discussion, thus giving abundant justification for the charge of heresy. For even one of his contentions, such as that the devil likewise was part of the substance of God, sufficed to make the pious councillors shudder. But as soon as his philosophical vanity had been affronted, Servetus showed no restraint in the expressions he

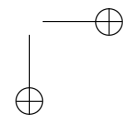




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used about the thorniest and most dangerous problems, forgetting that the councillors were not able theologians before whom he could unconcernedly expound the truth. His very eloquence, his eagerness for discussion, made Servetus suspect to his judges. More and more they inclined to Calvin's view, that this foreigner, who, with gleaming eyes and clenched fists, railed against the doctrines of their Church, must be a dangerous disturber of the spiritual peace, and was probably an incurable heretic. Anyhow it was a good thing that he was being subjected to thorough examination. The court decided that he should remain under arrest, while his accuser, Nicolaus de la Fontaine, was to be set at liberty. Calvin had got his way and wrote joyfully to a friend: "I hope he will be condemned to death."

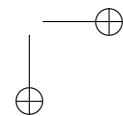
Why was Calvin so eager to obtain a capital sentence upon Servetus? Why was he not satisfied with the more modest triumph of having his adversary expelled the country, or humiliated in some similar way? Calvin did not detest Servetus more than he detested Castellio, and every one who defied his authority. He loathed all those who tried to teach others in a different way from that which he advocated, such a detestation being instinctive in a man of his tyrannical disposition. So here, if he was particularly enraged against





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Servetus and wished to take extreme measures at this particular moment, his motives were not private but political. The rebel against his authority, this Miguel Servetus, was to be the scapegoat for another opponent of Calvin's orthodoxy, the sometime Dominican monk, Hieronymus Bolsec, whom he had also tried to destroy as a heretic, and who, greatly to his annoyance, had escaped. Bolsec, generally respected as family doctor to the leading patricians in Geneva, had openly attacked the weakest and most vulnerable point of Calvin's teaching, the rigid doctrine of predestination, using the argument which Erasmus had used against Luther. It was impossible, declared both these "heretics," that God, as the principle of all good, could wittingly and willingly impel human beings to perform their worst deeds. Every one knows how infuriated Luther was by Erasmus's reasoning; and what a flood of abuse the most noted champion of the Reformation, this master of coarse invective, let loose against the elderly sage. Still, rough, ill-tempered, and violent as Luther was, he nevertheless adduced logical considerations against Erasmus, and never thought of having Erasmus haled before a secular court for challenging the doctrine of predestination. Calvin, with his mania of infallibility, regarded and treated every adversary as a heretic, objections to his religious doctrine



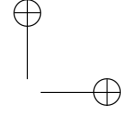
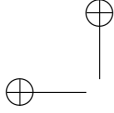


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being for him equivalent to a crime against the State. Instead, therefore, of answering Bolsec with theological arguments, he had his critic clapped into gaol.

Unexpectedly, however, his attempt to make a terrible example of Hieronymus Bolsec was a failure. There were too many in Geneva who knew the learned physician to be a god-fearing man; and, just as in the Castellio affair, so also in that of Bolsec, Calvin's behaviour aroused the suspicion that he desired to rid himself of one who was not completely subject to his will, that he might reign henceforward alone in Geneva. Bolsec's plaint penned while in prison, passed from hand to hand in numerous manuscript copies; and, despite Calvin's clamours, the Town Council was afraid of condemning the prisoner for heresy. To evade this painful decision, they declared themselves incompetent to deal with religious matters, and refused to transcend their powers by adjudicating in a theological affair. At any rate, the councillors declared, in this thorny question they must demand the formal opinion of the other Reformed Churches of Switzerland. This demand was Bolsec's salvation, for the Reformed Churches of Zurich, Berne, and Basle – being in their hearts ready enough to give their fanatical colleague in Geneva a setback – unanimously declined to regard Bolsec's





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utterances as blasphemous. The accused was acquitted by the Town Council: Calvin was refused his victim, and had to content himself with the municipal authority's decree that Bolsec should leave the town.

Nothing but a new and successful charge of heresy could make people forget that Calvin's theological supremacy had been successfully impugned. A victory over Servetus must compensate the dictator for his failure to make an end of Bolsec; and against Servetus the chances of success were enormously more favourable. Servetus was a foreigner. He had not, like Castellio and Bolsec, many friends, admirers, and helpers in Geneva. Besides, the reformed clergy everywhere had for years been outraged by his bold attacks on the Trinity and by his challenging ways. It would be much easier to make an example of this outsider who had no backing. From the first, the trial was pre-eminently political; was a question of whether Calvin was or was not to rule; was a tug of war to show whether he would be able to enforce his will as spiritual dictator. If Calvin had wanted nothing more than to rid himself of Servetus as a private and theological adversary, he could have done so easily enough. Hardly had the Geneva inquiry opened, when an envoy from the French judicial authorities arrived, to demand the handing over to Vienne





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of a refugee already sentenced in France, where the scaffold was ready for him. What a splendid opportunity for Calvin to play the magnanimous, and nevertheless to rid himself of this hated adversary. The Town Council of Geneva need merely approve the extradition, and, as far as Geneva was concerned, the tiresome affair of Servetus would be over and done with. For centuries the odium of condemning and burning this independent thinker would attach to the Catholic Inquisition. Calvin, however, opposed extradition. For him, Servetus was not a subject, but an object, with whose aid he would give an indubitable demonstration of the inviolability of his own doctrine. Servetus was to be a symbol, not a man. The French emissary, therefore, was sent back unsatisfied. The Protestant dictator intended to have the trial carried through under his own jurisdiction, that all and sundry might be convinced how disastrous it was to contradict Maitre Calvin.

Calvin's friends in Geneva, as well as his enemies, were not slow to realize that the Servetus case was nothing more than a test of the dictator's power. Naturally, therefore, friends as well as foes did what they could to prevent Calvin's getting his way. To the rival groups of politicians, the unhappy Servetus was nothing more than an in-





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strument, a crowbar with which the tyrant could, perhaps, be unseated. Little did any of them care whether this crowbar would break in their hands. Those who were most friendly to Servetus, did their protégé a very bad turn, for the false reports they circulated served only to increase Servetus's hysterical exaltation; and their secret missives to the prisoner urging the latter to stiffen his resistance could not fail to work mischief. All that interested them was to make the trial as sensational as possible. The more Servetus defended himself, the more rabid his onslaught on Calvin, the better.

Really, alas, there was no need to incite Servetus to fill the cup of his heedlessness. The hardships of his long imprisonment inflamed the wrath of a man already prone to neurotic frenzy, since, as Calvin could not but know, Servetus had been treated with refined harshness. For weeks, though in his own eyes he was innocent, he was kept like a condemned murderer in a cold and damp cell, with irons on hands and feet. His clothes hung in rags upon his freezing body; he was not provided with a change of linen. The most primitive demands of hygiene were disregarded. No one might tender him the slightest assistance. In his bitter need, Servetus petitioned the Council for more humane treatment, writing: "Fleas are devouring me; my





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shoes are torn to pieces; I have nothing clean to wear.”

A secret hand (we cannot but guess whose hand it was that gave the screw-press another turn) interfered when the Council proposed to better Servetus’s lot. The upshot was that this bold thinker and independent scholar was left to languish in his cell as a mangy dog might have been left to die upon a dunghill. Still more lamentable were the cries of distress uttered in a second letter, dated a few weeks later, when the prisoner was, literally, being suffocated in his own excrement. “I beg of you, for the love of Christ, not to refuse me what you would give to a Turk or a criminal. Nothing has been done to fulfil your orders that I should be kept clean. I am in a more pitiful condition than ever. It is abominably cruel that I should be given no chance of attending to my bodily needs.”

Still, nothing was done! Can we be surprised that when, once more, he was brought into court out of his befouled lair, he should explode with fury? This man in irons, clad in stinking rags, was confronted by his arch-adversary on the judges seat; by Calvin, wearing a spruce, black gown, calm and cool, thoroughly prepared for the fray after a good rest; by Calvin with whom the prisoner now wished to discuss matters, mind against mind,



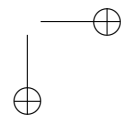


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scholar against scholar; by Calvin, who reviled Servetus as a criminal and an assassin? Was it not inevitable that Servetus, teased by the basest and most malicious questions and insinuations relating to the most private affairs of his sexual life, angered and tormented, should lose his self-control, and answer the outrageous queries with invectives, should rail coarsely against his accuser? Servetus was wearied beyond endurance by sleepless nights. Now the man to whom he owed so much inhuman treatment had to listen to a volley of abuse.

“Do you deny that you are an assassin? I will prove it by your actions. As regards myself, I confide in the justice of my cause and am not afraid of death. But you scream like a blind man in the desert, because the passion for vengeance burns in your heart. You lied, you lied, ignorant calumniator that you are. Wrath boils up within you when you are hounding any one to death. Would that all your magic were still hidden away within your mother’s womb, so that I could have a chance to recount your errors.”

In this outburst of wrath, the unhappy Servetus forgot the powerlessness of his position. His chains clanking, foaming at the mouth, he demanded of the Council, of his judges, that, instead of condemning him, they should pass sentence upon Calvin the law-breaker, upon the Genevese dictator.





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“Magician that he is, you should not only find him guilty and sentence him, but should banish him from your city, while his property should be made over to me in compensation for mine, which, through him, I have lost.”

It need hardly be said that the worthy councillors were horrified at such words and at the spectacle before them; that of a lean, pallid, emaciated man, with a tangled beard, who, with glowing eyes and speaking foreigner’s French, hurled abominable accusations at their Christian leader. They could not but consider him a man possessed, a man driven by the promptings of Satan. From hearing to hearing, their feelings towards him grew more and more unfavourable. Really the trial was over, and nothing left but to condemn the accused. But Calvin’s masked enemies wanted the affair to be long drawn out, still doing their utmost to deprive the dictator of the triumph he would secure from the condemnation of his adversary. Once more they did their utmost to save Servetus, arranging, as in Bolsec’s case, to secure the opinion of the other Swiss Reformed synods, actuated by the secret hope that in this instance, likewise, the victim of Calvin’s dogmatism would be torn from the zealots claws.





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Calvin, however, was only too well aware that his authority was shaken and might fall. It was essential for him to avoid a second reverse. He took measures accordingly, despatching, while his victim still rotted in prison, missive after missive to the synods of Zurich, Basle, Berne, and Schaffhausen, to influence the opinions of these bodies. Messengers were speeded to all points of the compass; friends were set in motion to warn his colleagues against helping so wicked a blasphemer to escape judgment. He was aided in his machinations by the fact that Servetus was known to be a disturber of the theological peace, and that since the days of Zwingli and Bucer, the "impudent Spaniard" had been loathed throughout Protestant Europe. The result was that the Swiss synods unanimously pronounced Servetus's views to be erroneous and wicked. Even though not one of the four religious communities frankly demanded or even approved capital punishment, they nevertheless endorsed on principle any severe measures that might be taken.

Zurich wrote: "We leave it to your wisdom to decide how this man should be punished." Berne answered that the judges in Geneva should "borrow the spirit of wisdom and strength," so that their Church and the other Swiss Churches should be well served, and they should all be freed "from





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this plague." Still the reference to settling the matter by violence was weakened by the exhortation: "We trust that you will decide to act in such a way as to do nothing which might seem unbecoming to Christian municipal authorities." Not one of those whose counsel Calvin sought, ventured openly to urge the passing of a death sentence. Nevertheless, since the Churches had approved the legal proceedings against Servetus, Calvin felt they would also approve the inevitable sequel; for, by their studied ambiguity, they left him a free hand. Whenever Calvin's hand was free, it struck hard and resolutely. Vainly now did those who secretly desired to help Servetus, endeavour at the last hour, when the opinions of the synods had been sent in, to try to avert the doom. Perrin and other republicans proposed an appeal to the Council of Two Hundred, the supreme authority. But it was too late; even Calvin's opponents felt it would be perilous to resist. On October 26th, by a majority vote of the Small Council sitting as High Court of Criminal Justice, Servetus was sentenced to be burned alive, this cruel verdict to take effect next day on the plateau of Champel.

Week after week, Servetus, shut away from the outer world, had indulged in extravagant hopes. He was a highly imaginative man; he had been yet

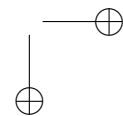




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more disordered by the whisperings of his alleged friends, and he clung more and more desperately to the illusion that he had convinced his judges of the soundness of his theses; so he felt assured that within a few days Calvin, the usurper, would be shamefully expelled from Geneva. How terrible was his awakening, when, with an inscrutable expression, the secretary of the Council entered his cell early in the morning of the 27th and ceremoniously unrolled a parchment to read the sentence. Servetus was thunderstruck. He listened as if unable to understand the words which informed him that this day he was to be burned alive as a blasphemer. For a few minutes he stood as if deaf and unconscious. Then the unhappy man's nerves gave way. He began to sob and to groan, until at length in his Spanish mother-tongue he cried aloud: "Misericordias!" His arrogance gave way before these terrible tidings. Crushed, almost annihilated, he succumbed to overwhelming discouragement. The domineering preachers, likewise a prey to illusion, believed that the hour had come in which, after gaining a secular triumph over Servetus, they would gain a spiritual triumph as well, that despair would wring from the prisoner a voluntary avowal of error.

Yet, marvellously enough, as soon as the poor, broken wretch was asked to repudiate his theses,

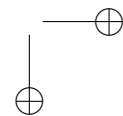




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as soon as his innermost faith was challenged, his pride flamed up anew. If his body was to be burned, his body was to be burned; but he would not abate a tittle of his beliefs; and during the last hours the knight errant of science rose to the stature of a martyr and hero of conviction. Though Farel hastened over from Lausanne to share in Calvin's triumph, Servetus contemptuously rejected Farel's promptings, declaring that a secular legal decision could never be accepted as proof of a man's rightness or wrongness in divine concerns. You might murder a man without convincing him. His mind had not been convicted of error, though his body was to be put to death. Neither by threats nor by promises, could Farel extract from the chained and doomed victim as much as a word of recantation. Still, since he held firmly to his conviction that he was no heretic but a believing Christian whose duty it was to reconcile himself even with the fiercest of his enemies, Servetus expressed a wish to see Calvin.

The only report of Calvin's visit is Calvin's own. Dead men tell no tales. Calvin's report of Calvin's behaviour admirably discloses Calvin's rigidity and harshness. The triumphant dictator came down into the victim's cold, dank, and dark cell, not to offer consolation, not to say a brotherly or Christian word of kindness to him who was about to





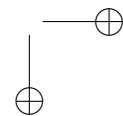
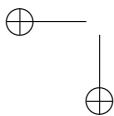
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die in torment. Quietly, in the most matter of fact way, Calvin opened the conversation by asking why Servetus had summoned him. Plainly he expected Servetus to kneel, to urge from the almighty dictator a cancelment, or at least a mitigation of the sentence. Servetus answered simply, so that any one with a human heart in his breast must be touched by the record, that his only object in sending for Calvin had been to beg forgiveness. The victim offered reconciliation to the inquisitor who had sent him to his doom. Calvin, however, stony of visage, could never regard a political and religious opponent as either a Christian or a man.

Read the words of his frigid report:

“My only answer was to say that I had never (this being the truth) regarded him with personal animus.”

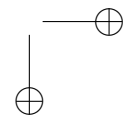
Calvin could not or would not understand the eminently peaceful nature of Servetus's last gesture. There could, said Calvin, be no reconciliation between him and Servetus. The latter must cease thinking of his own person, and frankly acknowledge his errors, his sinfulness towards God, whose trinitarian nature the condemned man had denied. Wittingly or unwittingly the ideologist in Calvin refused to recognize as a man and a brother this poor wretch, who that day would be committed like a worthless billet to the flames. As a rigid dogmatist,





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he could see in Servetus nothing more than one who had rejected his (Calvin's) conception of God, and thus had denied God. The only use Calvin wanted to make of his dictatorial power was to extract from Servetus during these last hours the avowal that Servetus was wrong and Calvin right. Since, however, Servetus recognized that this iron zealot wanted to deprive him of the only thing still left alive in his wasted body, that which the prisoner regarded as the immortal part of him – his faith, his conviction – Servetus stubbornly resisted, and resolutely refused to make the cowardly avowal. He had voluntarily declared his willingness to become reconciled with his adversary, man to man, Christian to Christian; but nothing would induce him, whose life was counted by minutes, to sacrifice the convictions to whose advocacy he had devoted a lifetime. The attempt at conversion failed. To Calvin it seemed that further speech was needless. One who in religious matters would not unhesitatingly comply with Calvin's will, was no longer Calvin's brother in Christ, but only one of Satan's brood, a sinner on whom friendly words would be wasted. Why show a trace of kindness to a heretic? Calvin turned away leaving his victim without a syllable and without a friendly glance. Here are the words with which this fanatical accuser closes his report, words which condemn him

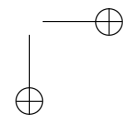




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for all eternity: “Since I could achieve nothing by argument and warning, I did not wish to be wiser than my Master. I followed the rule laid down by St. Paul, and withdrew from the heretic who had passed judgment on himself.”

Death at the stake by roasting with a slow fire is the most agonizing of all modes of execution. Even the Middle Ages, famous for cruelty, seldom carried out this punishment to an extremity. In most cases those sentenced to such a fate were not left to the mercy of the flames. They were strangled, or benumbed in some way. But this abominable death had been decreed for the first heretic sentenced to it by Protestants; and we can well understand that Calvin, when a cry of indignation rose from the humane persons still left in the world, would endeavour, long afterwards, very long afterwards, to shuffle off the responsibility for the exceptional cruelty of Servetus’s execution. He and the other members of the Consistory, so he tells us years after Servetus’s body had been reduced to ashes, tried to secure that the sentence of death by slow fire should be commuted into the milder one of death by the sword. Their labours had been vain. (*“Genus mortis conati sumus mulare, sed frustra.”*) In the minutes of the Council, we cannot find a word about such frustrated endeavours; and what unprejudiced person will believe that Calvin who,

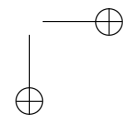




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throughout the trial, had put the screw upon the Council to pass a death sentence on Servetus, and had gained his end, should have suddenly become no more than an unimportant private citizen in Geneva, and should have been unable to ensure a more merciful method of execution? As far as the latter is concerned it is true that Calvin had contemplated a mitigation of the sentence – but only if Servetus were to purchase this mitigation by a spiritual sacrifice, by a last hour recantation. Not from human kindness, but from crude political calculation, Calvin would then, for the first time in his life, have shown himself gentle to an adversary. What a triumph it would have been for Genevese doctrine, if Servetus just before going to the stake, had admitted himself to be wrong, and Calvin to be right. What a victory to have compelled the Spanish blasphemer to acknowledge that he was not dying on behalf of his own doctrine but must admit before the whole population that Calvin's was the only true doctrine in the world.

Servetus, however, knew the price he would have to pay for any concession. Stubbornness was faced by stubbornness, fanaticism by fanaticism. He would rather die in unspeakable torment on behalf of his convictions than secure a more merciful death to favour the dogmas of Maitre Jehan Calvin. He would rather suffer agonies for half an hour,



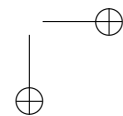


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winning thereby the crown of martyrdom, and attaching to Calvin for all time the stigma of utter barbarism. Servetus bluntly refused to comply, rallying his forces to endure his awful fate.

The rest is a tale of horror. On October 27th, at eleven in the morning, the prisoner was brought out of prison in his befouled rags. He was looking his last, with blinking eyes, at the light of day. His beard tangled, his visage dirty and wasted, his chains rattling, he tottered as he walked, and his ashen tint was ghastly on that clear autumn day. In front of the steps of the Town Hall, the officers of the law, having hustled him along (since weeks of inaction had almost robbed him of the power of walking), thrust him on to his knees. With lowered head, he listened to the sentence, which a syndic now read aloud to the assembled populace. It ended with the words: "We condemn thee, Miguel Servetus, to be conveyed in bonds to Champel, there to be burned alive, and with thee the manuscript of thy book and the printed volume, until thy body is consumed to ashes. Thus shalt thou end thy days, as a warning to all others who might wish to repeat thine offence."

The doomed man's teeth chattered with cold as he listened. In his extremity, he crawled on his knees nearer to the municipal authorities, as-





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sembled on the steps, and implored that by their grace he might be decapitated before his body was burned, "lest the agony should drive me to repudiate the convictions of a lifetime." If he had sinned, he went on, it had been unwittingly; for he had always been impelled by the one thought of promoting the divine honour.

At this moment, Farel pushed between the judges and the kneeling man. In a voice that could be heard far and wide, he asked whether Servetus was prepared to renounce the teaching he had directed against the Trinity, and thus to secure the boon of a milder form of execution. Servetus, however, though in most respects he was but a mediocre man, contemptuously rejected this offer, thus showing his moral greatness, his willingness to fulfil his pledge, his determination to suffer the worst on behalf of his convictions.

Now the procession moved on towards the place of execution. It was led by the lord lieutenant and his deputy, wearing the insignia of their rank and surrounded by a guard of archers. The crowd, eager for sensation, followed. All the way across the city, past numerous affrighted and silent spectators, Farel clung to the side of the condemned man, keeping step with Servetus, whom he continually asked for an acknowledgment of error and





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for repudiation of false doctrine. When Servetus, with genuine piety, answered that, though he was being put to death unjustly, he nevertheless implored God to be merciful to his accuser, Farel replied with dogmatic wrath: "What? After having committed the most abominable sin, do you still try to justify it? If you remain obstinate I shall leave you to God's judgment, and shall go no further beside you, although I had determined not to leave you before you should draw your last breath." Servetus made no further reply. He was nauseated by the executioners and the disputatious theologians, and would not vouchsafe them another word. Unceasingly this alleged heretic and atheist murmured, as if for his own comfort: "O God, save my soul, O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me." Then uplifting his voice, he begged all present to pray with him and for him. On reaching the place of execution, within sight of the stake, he kneeled once more to collect his thoughts in pious meditation. But the fanatical Farel, fearing lest this pure-hearted demeanour of a reputed heretic might make an impression upon the people, cried to them over the head of the condemned: "You see what power Satan possesses when he has a man in his claws! This fellow is most learned, and believed himself to be acting rightly. But now he is in Satan's grip and the like may happen to any of you."



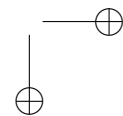


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Meanwhile the loathsome preparations were begun. The wood was piled round the stake to which the clanking chains had been nailed. The executioner bound the victim's hands. Then Farel, for the last time, pressed nearer to Servetus, who was only sighing, "O God, my God," and shouted fiercely: "Have you nothing more to say?" The contentious pastor still hoped that the sight of the post where he was to endure martyrdom would convince Servetus that the Calvinist faith was the only true one. But Servetus answered: "What else can I do than call on God?"

The disappointed Farel quitted his victim. Now it only remained for the other executioner, the official one, to perform his hateful task. The chains attached to the stake were wound four or five times around it and around the poor wretch's wasted body. Between this and the chains, the executioner's assistants then inserted the book and the manuscript which Servetus had sent to Calvin under seal to ask Calvin's fraternal opinion upon it. Finally, in scorn, there was pressed upon the martyr's brow a crown of leaves impregnated with sulphur. The preliminaries were over. The executioner kindled the faggots and the murder began.

When the flames rose around him, Servetus uttered so dreadful a cry that many of the onlookers

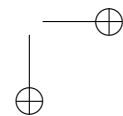


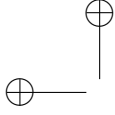


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turned their eyes away from the pitiful sight. Soon the smoke interposed a veil in front of the writhing body, but the yells of agony grew louder and louder, until at length came an imploring scream: "Jesus, Son of the everlasting God, have pity on me!" The struggle with death lasted half an hour. Then the flames abated, the smoke dispersed, and attached to the blackened stake there remained, above the glowing embers, a black, sickening, charred mass, a loathsome jelly, which had lost human semblance. What had once been a thinking earthly creature, passionately straining towards the eternal, what had been a breathing fragment of the divine soul, was now reduced to a vestige so offensive, so repulsive, that surely the sight of it might have made even Calvin aware how inhuman had been his conduct in arrogating to himself the right of becoming judge and slayer of one of his brethren.

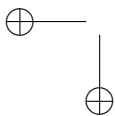
But where was Calvin in this fearful hour? Either to show himself disinterested or else to spare his nerves from shock, he had remained at home. He was in his study, windows closed, having left to the executioner and to Farel (a coarser brute than himself) the odious task of witnessing the execution. So long as no more was needed than to track down an innocent man, to accuse him, browbeat him, and bring him to the stake, Calvin had been an indefatigable leader. But in the hour

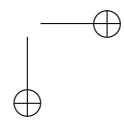
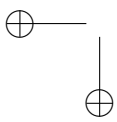
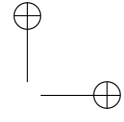
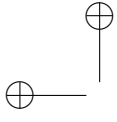




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of performance, he left matters to Farel and the paid assistants, while he himself, the man who had really willed and commanded this "pious murder," kept discreetly aloof. Next Sunday, however, clad in his black cassock, he entered the pulpit to boast of the deed before a silent congregation, declaring it to have been a great deed and a just one, although he had not dared to watch the pitiful spectacle.







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*To seek truth and to utter what one believes to be true,
can never be a crime. No one must be forced to accept a
conviction. Conviction is free.*
– Sebastian Castellio, 1551.

It was immediately recognized that the burning of Servetus had brought the Reformation to and beyond a parting of the ways. In a century disfigured by innumerable acts of violence, the execution of one man more might have seemed a trifling incident. Between the coasts of Spain and those of the lands bordering on the North Sea (not excepting the British Isles), Christians burned countless heretics for the greater glory of Christ. By thousands and tens of thousands, in the name of the “true Church” (the names were legion), defenceless





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human beings were haled to the place of execution, there to be burned, decapitated, strangled, or drowned. "If those thus butchered had been, I will not say horses, but only swine," we read in Castellio's *De haereticis*, "every prince would have considered he had sustained a grave loss." But, since only men and women were slain, no one troubled to count the victims. "I doubt," groans Castellio, "whether, in any epoch of the world's history, so much blood can have been shed as in our own."

But throughout the centuries, among numberless atrocities, it has always been one which might have seemed no worse than the others, that pricked apparently slumbering consciences. The flames which destroyed the martyred Servetus were a beacon overtopping all others at that day; and, two centuries later, Gibbon declared that this one sacrifice had scandalized him more deeply than the burning of hecatombs by the Inquisition. For, to quote Voltaire, the execution of Servetus was the first "religious murder" committed by the Reformation, and the first plain repudiation of the primary idea of that great movement. In and by itself, the very notion of "heretic" is absurd as far as a Protestant Church is concerned, since Protestants demand that every one shall have the right of interpretation. Thus, at the outset, Luther, Zwingli,





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and Melancthon, declared themselves strongly opposed to the use of forcible measures against those who stood in the wings of their movement and tended to exaggerate its purposes. Here are Luther's own words: "I have little love for death sentences, even though well deserved; what alarms me in this matter is the example that is set. I can, therefore, by no means approve that false doctors shall be put to death." In his pithy way he went on to say: "Heretics must not be suppressed or held down by physical force, but only combated by the word of God. For heresy is a spiritual affair, which cannot be washed away by earthly fire or earthly water." Zwingli was, if possible, even more emphatic in his repudiation of any appeal to the secular arm in such cases, and of any use of force.

Soon, however, the champions of the new doctrine, which had meanwhile established itself as a "Church," had to recognize what the authorities of the old Church had long known – namely, that in the long run power cannot be maintained without force. Consequently, to avoid coming to a decision (which could not really be avoided), Luther suggested a compromise, trying to distinguish between "heresy" and "sedition"; between "remonstrants," who only differed from the opinion of the Reformed Church in spiritual and religious matters, and "rebels," real "disturbers of the peace,"





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who, while challenging the established religious order, wanted also to change the social order. As regards these last, by whom he meant the communistically inclined Anabaptists, he approved the official use of force as a means of suppression. But not one of the early leaders of the Reformed Church could bring himself to the decisive step of delivering over to the executioner any who might hold other opinions than his own and might style themselves freethinkers. Too recent were the days when religious revolutionaries had battled against pope and emperor on behalf of their convictions, and had been proclaimed the champions of the most sacred rights of man. The establishment of a Protestant Inquisition seemed at the outset unthinkable.

But that was the epochal step taken by Calvin when he burned Servetus. Thereby he made short work of the "*Freiheit des Christenmenschen*" (freedom of the Christian man), which had been fought for by the Reformation; he outstripped the Catholic Church, which to its honour had for more than a thousand years hesitated to burn any one alive simply because he insisted upon interpreting Christian dogmas in his own way. But Calvin, in the second decade of his personal dominion, established his spiritual tyranny by burning alive one who challenged it; and, from the moral outlook,





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this deed was perhaps more abominable than all the misdeeds of Torquemada. Servetus was not slain as an atheist, for he had never been that; he was martyred because he had repudiated some of Calvin's theses. When, hundreds of years later, the free city of Geneva erected a monument to the freethinker Servetus, it vainly endeavoured to exculpate Calvin by describing Servetus as a "victim of his epoch." Montaigne was of that time, and so was Castellio. It was not the blindness and folly of his day which sent Servetus to the stake, but the personal despotism of Calvin. Unfaith and superstition may be expressions of an era; but for a particular misdemeanour, he alone is responsible who commits the offence.

Indignation grew rapidly from the first hour after Servetus's martyrdom, and even de Bèze, Calvin's official apologist, had to admit: "The ashes of the unhappy man were not yet cold when acrimonious discussion arose on the question whether heretics ought to be punished. Some hold that they must indeed be suppressed, but not by capital punishment. Others want to leave them to God's punishment." We see that de Bèze, though his general inclination was to glorify whatever Calvin did, was extremely hesitant here; and still more dubious were Calvin's other friends. Melanchthon, who had himself railed savagely





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against Servetus, wrote to his “dear brother” as follows: “The Church thanks you, and will thank you in days to come. The Genevese officials acted rightly when they condemned this blasphemer to death.” There was even to be found a scholar and zealot named Musculus to compose a pæan on the occasion – perpetual “*trahison des clercs.*” But these were the only voices of hearty approval. Zurich, Schaffhausen, and the other synods were far less enthusiastic than Geneva had hoped. Although, on principle, they may have thought it well that “over-zealous” sectarians should be intimidated, they were unquestionably glad that the first Protestant “act of faith,” the first destruction of a Nonconformist, had not taken place within their own walls, and that Jehan Calvin would have to bear the odium of this terrible decision.

But if these co-religionists did no more than damn with faint praise, adverse voices speedily made themselves heard. The most distinguished jurist of the day, François Baudouin, uttered a decisive opinion. “I hold that Calvin had no right to open a criminal prosecution over a point of religious doctrine.” Not merely were the freethinking humanists throughout Europe outraged; many of the Protestant clergy likewise expressed disapproval. Barely an hour’s walk from the gates of Geneva, and protected from Calvin’s minions by





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Bernese overlordship, the Vaud clergy declared in the pulpit that Calvin's treatment of Servetus had been irreligious and illegal. In Geneva itself, Calvin had to call in the aid of the police to repress criticism. A woman who publicly declared Servetus to be a martyr for the sake of Jesus Christ, was imprisoned; and so was a book printer for maintaining that the town authorities had condemned Servetus at the will and pleasure of one man. Some noted scholars of foreign nationality pointedly shook the dust from their feet as they hastened to quit a city where they no longer felt safe since a despotism had been established which was a menace to freedom of thought. Soon Calvin was forced to recognize that the martyrdom of Servetus had been much more dangerous to the dictatorship than had been the Spanish scholar's life and writings.

Calvin had a sensitive ear for any sort of contradiction. Careful though the Genevese were, under his regime, to mind their p's and q's, murmurs that found their way through keyholes and closed windows made the dictator realize that his fellow-burghers were restraining their wrath with difficulty. Still, the deed had been done. God Almighty Himself could not make it undone. Since to escape the consequences of his actions was im-





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possible, the best thing for Calvin was to put a bold front on the matter and blazon his responsibility. Despite himself, and inconspicuously, Calvin, who had begun with a cheerful offensive, was forced into the defensive. Friends unanimously assured him that it behoved him to find justifications for the “act of faith” thanks to which Servetus had been consigned to the flames. Somewhat reluctantly, therefore, he made up his mind to “enlighten” the world about Servetus and to compose an apologia for having slain that heretic.

But, in the Servetus affair, Calvin had an uneasy conscience; and a man with an uneasy conscience, try though he may to stifle his doubts, writes poor stuff. Naturally, therefore, his apologia, entitled *Defence of the True Faith and of the Trinity against the dreadful errors of Servetus*, a book which, as Castellio said, the dictator wrote “when his hands were still dripping with the blood of Servetus,” was one of the weakest of his writings. Calvin himself admitted that he penned it “*tumultuarie*” – that is to say, nervously, and in haste. How uncertain of his own position he felt, when thus forced to assume the defensive, is shown by the fact that he got all the pastors in Geneva to sign the manifesto as well as himself, so that others might share the responsibility. He found it disagreeable to be regarded as instigator to the





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murder of Servetus, with the result that the two opposing trends are clumsily mingled in the pronunciamento. On the one hand, warned by the widespread discontent, Calvin wished to shuffle responsibility on to the “authorities”; but on the other hand he had to prove that the Town Council had been perfectly right in destroying such a “monster” as the Spaniard. He presented himself as the mildest-mannered of men, as inveterately opposed to violence of any kind, filling the greater part of his book with complaints of the cruelty of the Catholic Inquisition, which sentenced true believers without giving them a chance to defend themselves, and then had them executed in the most barbarous way. (“What about you?” he would later be asked by Castellio. “Whom did you appoint to defend Servetus?”) He went on to astonish his readers by informing them that he had, in secret, done his utmost to bring Servetus to a better frame of mind. (“*Je ai pas cessé de faire mon possible, en secret, pour le ramener à des sentiments plus saints.*”) It had really been the Town Council, he declared, which, despite his inclination towards leniency, had insisted upon the death-sentence, and upon one of such peculiar cruelty. These alleged efforts of Calvin on behalf of Servetus, of the murderer on behalf of his victim, were “so secret,” that not a soul was found





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to believe a legend invented out of whole cloth. Castellio contemptuously marshals the facts. “The first of your ‘exhortations’ was nothing but invective; the second was, to commit Servetus to prison, where the Spaniard was not to leave until on his way to the stake where he was burned alive.”

While thus with one hand he waved away his personal responsibility for the martyrdom of Servetus, with the other hand Calvin produced the best evidence he could to exculpate “the authorities.” As usual, he grew eloquent when he had to justify suppression. It would be most unwise – so ran the argument – to allow every one liberty to say what he pleased (*“la liberté à chacun de dire ce qu’il voudrait”*), for then epicureans, atheists, and despisers of God would be heartily pleased. No doctrine but the true doctrine (i.e. that of Geneva) must be proclaimed. Such a censorship did not signify a restriction of liberty. (Intolerant despots always have recourse to the same logical fallacy.) *“Ce n’est pas tyranniser l’Eglise que d’empêcher les écrivains mal intentionnés de répandre publiquement ce qui leur passe par la tête.”* Those who are gagged to check the utterance of opinions discordant with the views of a dictator, are not subjected to any coercion, if we are to believe Calvin and others of his calibre; they have been justly treated, an example being made of them “for the greater glory of God.”





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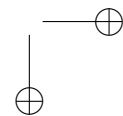
The weak point which Calvin had to defend did not concern the suppression of heresy, since such action had long since been copied by the Protestants from the Catholics. The real question at issue was whether the powerful possess the right to kill persons who hold other views than their own. In the case of Servetus, Calvin asserted this right from the outset, and his business now was to justify his action. Naturally he sought justification in the Bible, endeavouring to show that he had acted in accordance with the terms of a "higher commission," in obedience to a "divine command." That higher commission, that divine command, was what had led him to thrust Servetus out of the world. Yet he could not find convincing examples in Holy Writ, because the Bible has not formulated the notion of "heresy," but refers merely to "blasphemy." Now Servetus, who amid the flames continued to call upon the name of Jesus had never been an atheist. Calvin, always eager to quote from the Bible any passages that might serve his turn, declared nevertheless that it was a "sacred duty" imposed upon "authority," to eradicate all who held opinions subversive of authority (his own). "Just as an ordinary man would be blameworthy should he fail to draw his sword when the house of God is contaminated or when one of his adherents rebels against God, how much





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worse is such cowardice in a prince who shuts his eyes when wrong is done to religion." The sword is put into the hands of authorities that they may use it "for the honour of God." For actions performed in "saint zèle" are justified in advance. The defence of orthodoxy, of the true faith, dissolves the ties of blood, the dictates of human kindliness. A man must destroy even his most immediate adherents when Satan has driven them to repudiate the "true" religion; and (we shudder as we read) "*On ne lui [Dieu] fait point l'honneur qu'on lui doit, si on ne préfère son service à tout regard humain, pour n'épargner ni parentage, ni sang, ni vie qui soit et qu'on mette en oubli toute humanité quand il est question de combattre pour sa gloire.*" With terrifying bluntness we are told that Calvin can regard as pious only those who, for the sake of doctrine (his doctrine), suppress "*tout regard humain,*" that is to say, every sense of humaneness. Here we have a ghastly but tragical demonstration of the lengths an otherwise clear thinker and a profoundly religious man could go when blinded by fanaticism. He would willingly hand over to the Inquisition his friends, his brethren, and his kindred by blood, whenever they differed from him upon the minutest article of doctrine and held another opinion than that of the Consistory. Lest any one should repudiate so barbarous a contention, Calvin





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turned to his last and favourite argument, that of the Terror. He declared that any one who should defend or accuse a heretic was himself guilty of heresy and marked for punishment. Since he could not endure contradiction, Calvin proposed to intimidate those who might be moved to contradict him, threatening the offenders with the fate which had befallen Servetus. To the stake with them if they would not hold their tongues. Calvin wished to be free once for all from being worried about this vexatious question of the murder of Servetus. The incident must be closed.

But the accusing voice of the slain could not be silenced however shrilly and furiously Calvin might rage, yelling exculpations to the world. The Calvinist apologia, with its clamours to the faithful to undertake a heresy hunt, made a most unfavourable impression. The best of the Protestants were horrified at the prospect of establishing the Holy Inquisition within their own Church. Some declared that it would have been less offensive if so monstrous a thesis had been advocated by the Town Council instead of by a preacher of God's word, by one of Christ's servants. With splendid resolution, Zerchintes, town clerk of Berne, subsequently to be Castellio's loyal fiend and protector, proclaimed his position: "I avow," he wrote privately to Calvin, "that I, too, am one of those who





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would fain limit as far as possible the right to inflict capital punishment on account of differences in matters of faith; only excepting those whose error is deliberate and voluntary. What determines my judgment in these matters is, not those passages of Holy Writ which can be quoted against the use of force, but the example of the way in which, here in Berne, the Anabaptists have been mishandled. I myself saw a woman of eighty dragged to the scaffold, together with her daughter, a mother of six children, these two women having committed no other offence than to repudiate infant baptism. In the light of such an example, I dread lest the legal authorities might not be restrained within the limits you yourself would like to establish, and lest they might be inclined to treat petty offences as great crimes. I therefore deem it advisable that the authorities should be unduly clement and considerate instead of being over-ready to appeal to the sword. I would rather shed my own blood than be stained with the blood of a man who had done nothing to deserve punishment by death.”

These are the words of a minor municipal officer in a fanatical epoch. Many shared his views while thinking it inexpedient to utter them. Even the worthy Zerchintes was as little inclined as his master, Erasmus of Rotterdam, had been to take a definite side in current disputes. Shamefacedly





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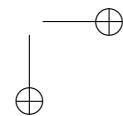
he informed Calvin that he did not intend to make a public protest. "I shall not step down into the arena unless my conscience forces me to do so. I would rather remain dumb, so far as my conscience allows, instead of rousing discussions and mortifying any one." Persons of a humane disposition are too ready to resign themselves to events, thus playing into the hands of the violent. Nearly all of them behaved like this excellent but pacific Zerchintes. They were steadfastly silent; the humanists, the clergy, the scholars; some from hatred of public broils; others from fear lest they themselves should be suspected of heresy if they failed (hypocritically) to declare that the execution of Servetus had been a praiseworthy deed. Matters reached such a pass that it seemed as if all would comply with Calvin's preposterous demand that dissentients must be persecuted. Unexpectedly, however, a voice was raised, a voice well known to Calvin and detested by him, to accuse, in the name of affronted humanity, the man responsible for the murder of Miguel Servetus. This was the limpid voice of Castellio, who had never yet been intimidated by the threats of the Genevese dictator, and who resolutely risked his life in order to save the lives of countless others.





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In spiritual warfare, not those are the best champions who light-heartedly and passionately begin the feud, but those who hesitate long, because they are lovers of peace, and because their resolutions are slowly formed. Not until they have exhausted every possibility of an understanding, and have recognized that recourse to arms is inevitable, do they joylessly accept the position thrust on them and rally to the defence; but those who have found it most difficult to decide upon militant action, are, once they have decided, the most steadfast of all. So was it with Castellio. Being a true humanist, he had no love for contention. Conciliatory methods were far more conformable to his gentle and profoundly religious nature. Like his spiritual ancestor Erasmus, he knew that truth has many facets, whether it be earthly or divine; nor was it by chance that one of his most important works (penned in 1562, but only now in the press) received the momentous title *De arte dubitandi*, "Concerning the Art of Doubting." Castellio's unceasing self-examination was far from making him a sceptic; his caution rendered him considerate towards other opinions than his own; and he would rather be silent than prematurely take a hand in a quarrel in which he had neither lot nor part. After having, for the sake of internal freedom, voluntarily surrendered office and dignity, he withdrew from





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political life, preferring to devote himself to a spiritually creative deed, the translation of the Bible into Latin and French, He found a quiet home in Basle, the last enclave of religious freedom. There the university was still safeguarding the bequests of Erasmus, and for this reason the survivors of what had once been a pan-European movement fled thither, in order to escape persecution by ecclesiastical dictators. In Basle lived Karlstadt, expelled by Luther from Germany; Bernardino Ochino, whom the Roman Inquisition had hunted out of Italy; Castellio, chased by Calvin from Geneva; Laelius Socinus and Coelius Secundus Curio; and, under the mask of an assumed name, the Anabaptist David Joris, who had been outlawed in the Low Countries. A common destiny and their joint subjection to persecution brought these refugees together, although in religious matters they by no means shared one another's views. But genuine humanists never need agreement upon the minutest points of doctrine before they can enter into friendly relations. Those who had renounced the claims of the various dictators to exercise authority over their minds as well as their bodies, led a quiet and retired existence in Basle. They did not shower tracts and pamphlets upon the world; they did not deliver disputatious lectures; they did not form leagues and sects. What drew





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them ever more closely together was the distress with which they regarded the increasing stringency of those who exercised dictatorial powers in the realm of the spirit as well as in the realm of the flesh. Lonely “remonstrants” (as the opponents of any sort of dogmatist terror came later to be called) were united in terms of peaceful fraternity.

Of course these independent thinkers regarded the burning of Servetus and the ferocious pamphlet in which Calvin defended his action, as a declaration of war. Anger and horror animated them at so audacious a challenge. They recognized that the issue was decisive. If such a monstrous deed were left unchallenged, then there was an end to freedom of thought in Europe. Might would be enthroned as right. But “after so splendid a dawn,” after the Reformation had raised the banner of “liberty of conscience” throughout the world, was there to be a relapse into the realm of “Cimmerian darkness”? Were all Christians who did not share Calvin’s views in every respect to be extirpated with fire and sword? Was it not essential, at this critical hour, and before a thousand similar fires were kindled from the flames of Champel, to proclaim loudly that men who in spiritual matters held other views than those in power, must not be hunted like wild beasts or cruelly executed like robbers and murderers? Even though rather be-





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latedly, the world must definitely understand that intolerance was unchristian, and, when it took the form of terrorism, inhuman. A plain word must be spoken on behalf of the persecuted and against the persecutor.

It was necessary to speak loudly and clearly – but was this still possible? There are times in which the simplest and least ambiguous truth needs to be disguised before it can be disseminated; when the humanest and most sacred thoughts must be smuggled through back doors, masked and veiled like thieves, because the front doors are watched by the catchpoles and mercenaries of the authorities. Again and again, in history, recurs the absurd spectacle that, whereas all incitations of one people or one faith against the others are tolerated and encouraged, all conciliatory tendencies, all pacifist ideals, are regarded with suspicion and are suppressed on the pretext that they are dangerous to some civil or religious body. They are stigmatized as “defeatist,” as likely to undermine pious or patriotic zeal because of their universally humanist trend. Thus, under the terror established by Calvin, Castellio and his adherents dared not promulgate their views openly. A manifesto on behalf of toleration, an appeal to our common humanity such as they planned,





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would be frustrated on the very first day by the embargo of the spiritual dictatorship.

Force, therefore, had to be met with cunning. A name was expressly coined. "Martinus Bellius" was announced as author of a new work; and on the title page of what was really Castellio's book, there appeared a false name as place of publication (Magdeburg instead of Basle). But, above all, in the text of this volume, an appeal for the rescue of persecuted innocents masqueraded as a scientific or a theological treatise. It was made to appear as if, in an academic way, learned ecclesiastical and other authorities were discussing the question: "*De haereticis an sint persequendi et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum doctorum virorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae*" – or, translated: "Concerning heretics, whether they should be persecuted, and what is to be done about them, illustrated by the opinions of many learned authors both old and new." Indeed, one who should merely flutter the pages of *De haereticis*, might well believe it to be nothing more than a pious theoretical tract, for here he would find the opinions of the most noted Fathers of the Church, those of St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, and St. Jerome, imprinted peacefully side by side with selections from the writings of such great Protestant authorities as Luther and Sebastian Franck, or those of non-

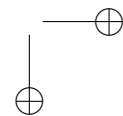




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partisan humanists like Erasmus. Here, surely, was nothing but a scholastic anthology, a juristic and theological assemblage of quotations from divers philosophers, compiled in order to help the reader to form an unbiased opinion concerning this difficult problem. But a closer examination shows that no opinions are quoted other than those which declare the passing of death-sentences upon heretics to be improper. The cunning, the only malice, of this book penned in deadly earnest, lay in the fact that among the authorities who condemn the use of the last extremities of force against heretics, we find one name which must have been peculiarly galling to Calvin, namely, Calvin's own. Jehan Calvin's opinion had been promulgated in the days when he himself was persecuted, and was averse to fierce appeals to fire and sword. The slayer of Servetus, Calvin to wit, was condemned by Calvin as unchristian, in the following signed passage: "It is unchristian to use arms against those who have been expelled from the Church, and to deny them rights common to all mankind."

But what gives a book its value is that which it openly expresses, and not the meaning that is hidden away out of sight. In the dedication to the Duke of Wurtemberg, Castellio puts the dots on the i's, and the crosses on the t's. It is the opening and closing words of this dedication which lift the





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theological anthology above the level of a fugitive polemic. Though the dedication to the duke occupies little more than a dozen pages, they were the first pages in which it was claimed that freedom of thought had a sacred right of asylum in Europe. Although written only in favour of heretics, the dedication constitutes an animated defence of all those who, in later days, were to be persecuted by other dictators because they demanded political or philosophical independence. The struggle against the hereditary enemy of spiritual justice, against the narrowness of the fanatics who wish to suppress opinions running counter to those of their own party, was here definitively opened. That restrictive notion was victoriously confronted by the idea whose spread is the only way of liquidating hostilities on earth – the idea of toleration.

Castellio developed his thesis with dispassionate logic, lucidly and irrefutably. The question at issue was whether heretics should be persecuted, and punished with death for what was a purely intellectual offence. But before discussing this, Castellio inquires: “What do we really mean by the term heretic?” Whom are we entitled to call a heretic, without being unjust? Castellio’s answer runs: “I do not believe that all those who are termed heretics, are really heretics. . . . The appellation has to-day become so abusive, so terrifying, carries





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with it such an atmosphere of opprobrium, that whenever a man wishes to rid himself of a private enemy, he finds that the most convenient way is to accuse this foe of heresy. As soon as others hear the dreaded name, they are filled with such overwhelming fear that they stop their ears, and blindly assail, not only the alleged heretic, but also those who venture to say a word in his favour.”

Castellio refused to become infected by such a hysteria for persecution. He knew that each era discovers a fresh group of unhappy persons upon whom to empty the vials of collective hatred. Sometimes it is on account of their religion, sometimes on account of the colour of their skin, their race, their origin, their social idea, their philosophy, that the members of some comparatively small and weak group are made targets for the annihilative energies latent in so many of us. The watchwords, the occasions, vary; but the method of calumny, contempt, destruction, remains unchanged. Now, declared the writer, an intelligent being should not allow himself to be blinded by such defamatory words, or to be carried away by the fury of mass instincts. Again and again, with a fresh devotion to balance and to justice, he must seek the right. Consequently, in this matter of heretics, “Martinus Bellius” refused to take up a





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definitive position until he had fully mastered the significance of the word.

What, then, is a heretic? Castellio returned again and again to this question. Since Calvin and the other inquisitors declared the Bible to be the only valid law-book, Bellius searched the pages of Holy Writ with the utmost care. Lo, he could not find the word or the concept in scripture. A dogmatic system, an orthodoxy, a unified doctrine, had to come into existence for the word “heretic” to gain currency; no one could rebel against a Church until that Church became an institution. True, in the Bible we find references to unbelievers and the need for their punishment. But it does not follow that one who is called a heretic is therefore an unbeliever. The case of Servetus furnished proof of this. Those who had been styled heretics, above all the Anabaptists, maintained that they were true and genuine Christians, and honoured the Saviour as their most sublime and beloved exemplar. Since no Christian ever called a Turk, a Jew, or a heathen a “heretic,” heresy must be a crime committed wholly within the Christian fold. Thus we derive a new formulation. Heretics are persons who, although they are Christians, do not profess “true” Christianity, but stubbornly deviate in one way or another from the “right” path.





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Have we now found our definition? Alas, how are we to decide which, among the multifarious interpretations, is “true” Christianity, or which is the “right” interpretation of the word of God? Do we find it in the Catholic, the Lutheran, the Zwinglian, the Anabaptist, the Hussite, or the Calvinist exegesis? Is there such a thing as absolute certainty in religious matters, and is it always possible to achieve a “sound” interpretation of Holy Writ? Castellio was bold enough, in defiance of the self-confident Calvin, to answer with a modest No. The meaning of Holy Writ was sometimes plain and sometimes obscure. “The truths of religion,” wrote this man who was fundamentally religious, “are in their nature mysterious, and, after more than a thousand years, are still the field of unending struggle, in which blood will not cease to flow until spiritual love illumines us and is given the last word.” Any one who interprets Holy Writ can make a mistake, and therefore toleration is the first duty of the Christian. “If all things were as clear and plain as is the existence of God, Christians could easily be of one way of thinking in religious matters, just as all nations are united in the recognition that there is a God. Since, however, all is obscure and confused, Christians should cease to condemn one another. If we





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are wiser than the heathen, let us show ourselves better and more compassionate than were they.”

Castellio has advanced a step in his disquisition. Any one who, though he recognizes the fundamentals of the Christian faith, fails to do so in the way pleasing to the established authorities, is styled a heretic. Heresy, therefore (here at length we reach the core of the matter), is not an absolute, but a relative concept. Of course for a Catholic, a Calvinist is a heretic; and equally of course for a Calvinist, an Anabaptist is a heretic. The man who in France is accounted a true believer, is a heretic in Geneva; and conversely. He who in one country will be burned as a criminal is, in a neighbouring land, acclaimed a martyr. “Whereas in one city or one neighbourhood, they will style you a true believer, in the next city, or the adjoining neighbourhood, they will despise you as a heretic; so that he who to-day wishes to live undisturbed, must have as many convictions and religions as there are towns and countries.” Now Castellio comes to his last and boldest formulation. “When I reflect on what a heretic really is, I can find no other criterion than that we are all heretics in the eyes of those who do not share our view.” This seems extremely simple, almost commonplace, so obvious is it. But to say as much frankly, demanded immense moral courage in those





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days. For the significance of this formulation was that a whole era, its leaders, princes and priests, Catholics and Lutherans alike, were flatly told that their heresy-hunting was absurd, and the outcome of an illusion. Thousands and tens of thousands had been persecuted and put to death, hanged, drowned, or burned, illegally; they were innocent, for they had not committed any crime against God or the State: they had not lived apart from their fellows in the realm of action, but only in the invisible world of ideas. Who is entitled to direct a fellow man's thoughts, or to consider the latter's intimate and most private convictions a crime at common law? Not the State, nor any other established authority. We read in the Bible that we are to render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and Castellio quotes Luther to the effect that the earthly kingdom has command only over the body, whereas, as far as the soul was concerned, God did not wish any mundane law to prevail. The State is entitled to insist that every subject shall comply with the dictates of external and political order. Consequently, any authoritative interference in the internal world of moral, religious, and (let me add) artistic convictions, so long as these do not involve manifest rebellion against the essence of the State (in modern terminology, so long as they do not involve political agitation) signifies an abuse of





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power, and an invasion of the inviolable rights of the individual. For what happens in this inner world, no one is responsible to the State, seeing that “with regard to these matters every one can make a personal appeal to God.” The State authority has no concern with matters of opinion. Why, then, should people foam at the mouth when they come across some one whose philosophical convictions differ from their own; why this instant call for the police; why this murderous hatred? In default of a conciliatory spirit, true humaneness is impossible. “We can only live together peacefully when we control our intolerance. Even though there will always be differences of opinion from time to time, we can at any rate come to general understandings, can love one another, and can enter the bonds of peace, pending the day when we shall attain unity of faith.”

The blame for these butcheries, for these barbarous persecutions which dishonour the name of man, does not accrue to the “heretics.” They are blameless. No one can be taken to task for his thoughts or his convictions. Guilt, in a perpetually guilty world suffering from illusions and wild confusion, attaches to fanaticism, to the impatience of idealists who will not admit that any other idea, religion, or philosophy than their own can be true. Inexorably Castellio pillories such maniacal





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presumption. “Men are so strongly convinced of the soundness of their own opinions, or, rather, of the illusive certainty that their own opinions are sound, that they despise the opinions of others. Cruelties and persecutions are the outcome of arrogance, so that a man will not tolerate others differing in any way from his own views, although there are to-day almost as many opinions as there are individuals. Yet there is not one sect which does not condemn all the others and wish to reign supreme. That accounts for banishments, exiles, incarcerations, burnings, hangings, the blind fury of the tormentors who are continually at work, in the endeavour to suppress certain outlooks which displease our lords and masters, or, often enough, for no explicable reason.” Obstinacy on one side, leads to obstinacy on the other. As a result of spiritual intolerance, “as a result of the savage and barbaric desire to commit cruelties, we see many to-day who are so greatly inflamed by calumny that they grow enraged when one of those sentenced to execution is mercifully strangled before the faggots are fired.”

Only one thing can save mankind from such barbarism – toleration. Our world has room for many truths, which, if people had goodwill, could abide harmoniously together. “Let us be tolerant towards one another, and let no one condemn





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another's belief." Heresy hunts are needless, as is any sort of persecution of opinion. Whereas Calvin, in his exculpation, had adjured princes to use fire and sword for the unsparing extirpation of heresy, Castellio implores the potentates to "incline, rather, to the side of clemency, and never yield to those who incite you to murder, for they will not stand beside you as helpers when you are called to your last account; they will have enough to do in order to defend themselves. Believe me, if Christ were here on earth today, He would never advise you to kill those who call on His name, even though they may err upon some detail, or may deviate from the right path."

Dispassionately, as is proper when intellectual problems call for solution, Sebastian Castellio discussed the thorny question of the guilt or innocence of so-called heretics. He carefully weighed the pros and cons; and demanded the establishment of a city of spiritual freedom to which these hunted wretches might resort for asylum. Though he felt certain of his ground, he presented his opinions humbly, whereas the sectarians, like cheapjacks in the market-place, extolled their dogmatic wares noisily. Each of these narrow-minded doctrinaires screamed from his pulpit that he and no other was hawking the true belief, that only through





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his voice and in his words could God's will be proclaimed, whilst Castellio said simply: "I do not speak to you claiming to be a prophet sent by God, but as a man drawn from the masses, who detests contentiousness, and whose only wish is that religion shall seek to establish itself not through quarrels, but through compassionate love, not through outward practice, but through the inward service of the heart." Doctrinaires talked to one another as to schoolboys and slaves; but the humanists addressed one another as brother to brother, as man to man.

Nevertheless, a truly humane man could not but be strongly moved by the sight of inhuman deeds. The hand of an honest writer could not calmly go on penning statements of principle when his mind was profoundly disturbed by the illusions of his time; his voice could not but tremble when his nerves vibrated in just indignation. Thus, in the long run, Castellio could not restrain himself, or confine himself to academic inquiries concerning the martyrdom at Champel, where an innocent man was put to death amid unspeakable tortures, a scholar destroyed by a scholar, a theologian by a theologian, in the name of the religion of love.

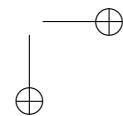
The image of the tortured Servetus, the mass-persecutions of heretics, made Castellio raise his eyes from the written page to seek those who were





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inciting to such cruelties, those who were fruitlessly trying to excuse their intolerance on the ground that they were pious servants of God. Calvin is fiercely envisaged when Castellio exclaims: “However horrible these things may be, the sinners sin yet more horribly when they endeavour to wrap up their misdeeds in the raiment of Christ, and declare that they act in accordance with His will.” Castellio knows that persons in authority always endeavour to justify their deeds of violence by appealing to some religious or philosophical ideal. But blood besoils any idea on whose behalf it is shed, and violence debases the thoughts it claims to defend. Miguel Servetus had not been burned at Christ’s command, but at the command of Jehan Calvin, and this was a disgrace to the whole of Christendom. “Who,” exclaims Castellio, “would to-day wish to become a Christian when those who confess themselves Christians are slain by other Christians without mercy by fire and water and the sword, and treated more cruelly than murderers or robbers? Who would wish to go on serving Christ when he sees how to-day any one that differs in some paltry detail from persons who have wrested power to themselves, is burned alive in the name of Christ, although, like Servetus, he calls on Christ amid the flames, and loudly declares himself a believer in Christ? What more could





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Satan do than burn those who call on the name of Jesus?"

This admirably humane man therefore feels it is time to dispel the illusion that persons are martyred and murdered merely because, on the intellectual plane, they differ from the potentates of the hour. And since he sees that potentates always misuse their powers, and since he himself, alone, a weakling, is the only person on earth to espouse the cause of the persecuted and the hunted, he despairingly raises his voice and ends his appeal in an ecstatic fugue of compassion.

"O Creator and king of the world, dost thou see these things? Art thou become so changed, so cruel and so contrary to thine own self? When thou wast on earth none was more mild, more clement, more patient of injury. When scourged, spat upon, mocked, crowned with thorns and crucified between two thieves, in the midst of thy humiliation thou didst pray for those who had done these shameful things to thee. Art thou now so changed? I implore thee in the sacred name of thy Father: can it really be thy will that those who do not understand thy precepts as the mighty shall be drowned, cut with lashes to the entrails, sprinkled with salt, dismembered by the sword, roasted at a slow fire, and tortured to death as cruelly as possible? Dost thou command and approve





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these things, O Christ? Is it really thy servants who have organized such butcheries, who thus flay thy people and chop them to mincemeat? Art thou really present when people call thy name in witness during such atrocities, as if thou wert anhungered for human flesh? If thou, Christ, do really command these things, what is left over for Satan to do? What a terrible blasphemy it is to declare that thou couldst command these deeds of Satan! What base presumption on the part of men to ascribe to Christ that which can only come to pass through the will and inventiveness of the Devil.”

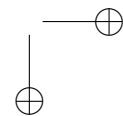
Had Sebastian Castellio written nothing more than the preface to the book *De haereticis*, and in that preface, nothing but this page, his name would remain imperishable in the history of mankind. For how solitary was his voice; how little hope could he have that his adjuration would find hearers in a world where the clash of arms dulled the sound of words and where war was the last appeal. Still, though they have been promulgated again and again by religious teachers and by sages, the most humane demands of forgetful mankind must be restored to memory. “Doubtless I say nothing,” adds the modest Castellio, “which others have not said before me. But it is never superfluous

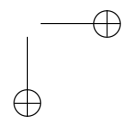
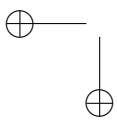
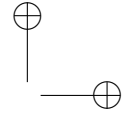
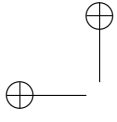




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to repeat what is true and just until it enforces recognition." Since, in every age, violence renews itself in changed forms, the struggle against it must continually be renewed by those who cling to the things of the spirit. They must never take refuge behind the pretext that at the moment force is too strong for them. For what it is necessary to say cannot be said too often, and truth can never be uttered in vain. Even when the Word is not victorious, it manifests its eternal presence; and one who serves it at such an hour has given glorious proof that no Terror holds sway over a free spirit, but that even in the most cruel of centuries there is still a place for the voice of humaneness.







CONSCIENCE AGAINST VIOLENCE

Persons who are ruthless in the attempt to suppress the opinions of others, are extremely sensitive to contradiction. Thus Calvin regarded it as monstrously unjust when the world at large ventured to discuss Servetus's execution, instead of enthusiastically accepting it without other comment than that it was a pious action most pleasing in the sight of Almighty God. With perfect seriousness the man who had just roasted a fellow man to death on account of a difference of opinion, demanded sympathy, not for the victim, but for himself. "If you could know," he wrote to a friend, "of as much as a tenth of the invectives and onslaughts to which I have been subjected, you would feel compassion for me in my tragical position. On all sides, the curs are yapping at me; every conceivable term of abuse has been showered on me. Even more

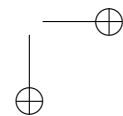




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fiercely than by my papistical adversaries, am I attacked by those of my own camp who are inspired with envy and hatred." Great was Calvin's exasperation when he found that, notwithstanding the texts he quoted from the Bible and the arguments he vociferated, he was not to get away unchallenged after the murder of Servetus. The neurotic irritability roused in him by an uneasy conscience, became intensified to panic as soon as he learned that Castellio and others in Basle were preparing a polemic against him.

The first thought of any one of dictatorial temperament, is to suppress or to gag opinions differing from his own. On hearing from Basle, Calvin seated himself at his writing-desk, and, without having read the book *De haereticis*, he exhorted the Swiss synods to prohibit its circulation. Above all, there must be no more discussion. Geneva had spoken, "Geneva locuta est"; what ever other persons might wish to contribute to the story of Servetus must, on general principle, be stigmatized as error, nonsense, falsehood, heresy, or blasphemy – because it would express opposition to Calvin. His pen worked busily. On March 28, 1554, he wrote to Bullinger that a book had been published in Basle, with a false name on the title-page, in which Castellio and Curio endeavoured to prove that heretics ought not be cleared out of the way

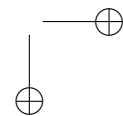




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by force. It would never do to allow such a doctrine to be diffused, since it was “poisonous to demand considerateness, this implying that heresies and blasphemies are not to be regarded as unpunishable offences.” Quick, quick, a gag for these advocates of toleration! “May it please God that the pastors of our Church, even though somewhat late in the day, shall see to it that this mischief shall not spread.” One appeal did not suffice him. Next day, his second self, Théodore de Bèze, wrote even more urgently: “You will find on the title-page the name of Magdeburg as the place of publication, but to my way of thinking this Magdeburg must be on the banks of the Rhine, in the place where many other such infamies have had their birth. I cannot but ask myself what is still left intact of the Christian religion if people are going to ‘tolerate’ what this miscreant has spewed out in his preface.”

Such protests, however, came a day after the fair. The polemic appeared before the denunciation. When the first copy reached Geneva, there was a volcanic eruption of fury. What? Were there actually persons who wished to give humanity precedence over discipline? Those who held unrighteous views were to be handled gently, in a brotherly spirit, instead of being hurried to the stake? Was every Christian to be allowed to inter-





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pret Holy Writ according to his will and pleasure, instead of that privilege being reserved for the Genevese Consistory? This would be a deadly peril to the Church – by which Calvin naturally meant his own Church. As if at the word of command, shouts of “Heresy!” were raised in Geneva. “A new heresy has been discovered!” – thus people cried to all the winds of heaven; a peculiarly dangerous heresy, “Bellianism.” The name was henceforward and for a considerable time given to the doctrine of toleration in matters of belief, the word being coined from the name of the reputed author of the book *Martinus Bellius*, alias *Castellio*. “We must stamp out this burst of hell-fire before it spreads over the surface of the earth.” Frenzied with wrath, de Bèze wrote about the first public demand for toleration: “Since the earliest days of Christendom, no such infamies have been heard in the land.”

A council of war was summoned in Geneva. Should the polemic be answered or not? Zwingli’s successor, Bullinger, whom the Genevese had so urgently implored to have the book promptly suppressed, wrote shrewdly from Zurich to the effect that it would soon be forgotten unless it were advertised by suppression. Better take no steps against it. But Farel and Calvin, impatient as ever, insisted upon a public rejoinder. Since Calvin had

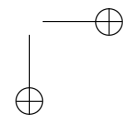




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not come off very well in a recent attempt, he preferred to remain discreetly in the background, and confided the theological spurs to one of his younger disciples, Théodore de Bèze, who was to earn the dictator's thanks by an overwhelmingly vigorous onslaught upon the "devilish" doctrine of toleration.

Théodore de Bèze, in general a pious and just man, who, as a reward for many years of faithful service to Calvin was in due time to succeed his chief, outdid even Calvin (as a servile spirit will often outdo a creative one) in his furious hatred of any breath of spiritual freedom. From him derives the terrible utterance which, in the history of thought, has given his name a sinister glory, "*Libertas conscientiae diabolicum dogma*" – freedom of conscience is a devilish doctrine. Away with freedom. Much better to destroy with fire and sword those who commit the abomination of independent thought; "better to have a tyrant, however cruel," exclaims de Bèze, "than permit every one to do what he pleases. . . . The contention that heretics should not be punished is as monstrous as the contention that parricides and matricides should not be put to death; for heretics are a thousandfold worse criminals than these." From the foregoing sample, the reader can judge





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to what insensate folly this pamphlet descended in its crusade against “Bellianism.” What? “*Monstres déguisés en hommes*” were to be treated with humaneness, in accordance with their own demand? No; discipline must come first, and humaneness afterwards. Never should a leader yield to the promptings of mercy when doctrine was at stake; for this would be “*charité diabolique et non chrétienne*.” Here, and not for the last time, we encounter the militant theory that humaneness – “*crudelis humanitas*” are de Bèze’s words – is a crime against mankind, since mankind can be led towards an ideological goal only by iron discipline and inexorable strictness. “We must not tolerate a few ravening wolves, unless we are prepared to deliver over to their fangs the whole flock of good Christians. . . . Shame upon this reputed clemency, which is in reality the utmost cruelty.” Thus de Bèze, in his zealous determination to exterminate the Bellianists; and he goes on to implore the authorities “*de frapper vertueusement de ce glaive*.”

Castellio, in the abundance of his compassion, had raised his voice to a merciful God, praying that an end should at length be put to this bestial slaughter. Now the Genevese pastor, inspired with hatred no less earnest than had been Castellio’s compassion, beseeches this same God to permit the massacre to continue without pause, “and that the





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Christian princes shall be vouchsafed enough magnanimity and firmness to extirpate the whole rout of evildoers." But even such an extirpation is not enough for the vengefulness of a de Bèze. Heretics should not merely be put to death, but their execution must be made as slow and painful as can be. Beforehand, he excuses every conceivable torture by the pious exclamation: "If they were to be punished in accordance with the measure of their offences, I think it would be difficult to find any form of martyrdom which could adequately chastise them for their heinous transgression." One sickens as one reads such pæans in defence of holy terror, such cruel arguments on behalf of brutality. Still, we have to bear them in mind, if we are to grasp the peril to which the Protestant world would have been exposed had it allowed itself to be driven by the hatred and fanaticism of the Genevise into the foundation of a new Inquisition – and also if we are to grasp how bold was the venture of the thoughtful souls who, in defiance of these maniacs, staked their lives on behalf of toleration. For de Bèze, in his libellus, demanded that, in order to blunt the edge of this dreadful idea of toleration, every friend of the doctrine, every advocate of "Bellianism," must henceforward be treated as "an enemy of the Christian religion" – must be regarded as a heretic, and, consequently, burned





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alive. “We should, in their own persons, teach them every point of the thesis I advocate, namely that atheists and heretics must be punished by the civil authorities.” To ensure that Castellio and his friends should have no doubt as to what awaited them if, prompted by their own consciences, they went on defending such wretches as Servetus, de Bèze assured them that the false name of the place of publication and the pseudonymous authorship would not save them from persecution. “Every one knows who you are and what are your plans. . . . I warn you while there is yet time, Bellius and Montfort and your whole clique.”

Only to outward seeming, then, was de Bèze’s tract a contribution to an academic dispute. The threat above quoted gives it its true significance. The defenders of spiritual freedom were to realize at last that they were putting their lives in peril every time they demanded humane treatment. In his impatient desire to make Sebastian Castellio, leader of the “Bellianists,” incautious, de Bèze accused him of cowardice. The Genevese pastor wrote scornfully: “He, who in other respects is so bold, shows in this book, which speaks so much of compassion and clemency, that he is a coward, inasmuch as he only ventures to thrust out his head when his face is covered by a mask.” Per-





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haps the writer hoped that Castellio would take warning, and cautiously retire into the background; or perhaps he really wanted Castellio to disclose himself. Anyhow, Castellio was quick to raise the gauntlet. The very fact that Genevese orthodoxy now showed itself disposed to make a dogma and a regular practice of its repulsive behaviour, forced Castellio, though a passionate lover of peace, to declare open war. He saw that the decisive hour had struck. Unless the crime committed upon Miguel Servetus was, though posthumously, brought before the court of appeal constituted by the whole of Christendom, brands from this first burning would be used to fire hundreds, nay, thousands, of similar ones. What had been no more than an isolated act of murder, would petrify into a principle. Intermittent, for the moment, his learned labours, Castellio devoted himself to writing the most important indictment of the century, the accusation of Jehan Calvin for a murder in the name of religion, committed on Miguel Servetus at Champel. This public accusation, *Contra libellum Calvini*, although primarily directed against an individual, proved, through its moral energy, one of the most splendid polemics ever penned against attempts to overpower the word by the law, opinion by dogma, and eternally free conscience by eternally contemptible force.





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For years and years Castellio had been acquainted with his adversary, and had grown familiar with his methods. He knew that Calvin would transmogrify every attack upon his person into an attack against doctrine, true religion, and even into an attack on God. Castellio, therefore, made it clear from the outset that in *Contra libellum Calvini*, he was neither accepting nor condemning the theses of Miguel Servetus, and was not proposing to pass any sort of judgment upon religious or exegetic problems, but was only bringing against the man, Jehan Calvin, a charge of murder. Being determined that no sophistical distortion should divert him from his purpose, in the lapidary style of an accomplished lawyer, he expounded the cause he was advocating. "Jehan Calvin enjoys great authority to-day, and I could wish that he enjoyed even more did I know him to be of a gentler disposition. But his last important public action was a bloody execution followed by threats levelled at a number of pious persons. That is why I, who detest the shedding of blood (should not all the world do this?), have undertaken, with God's help, to disclose Calvin's purposes to the world, or at least to bring back into the right path some of those whom he has led astray.

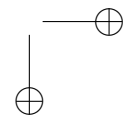
"On October 27, 1553, the Spaniard, Miguel Servetus, was burned in Geneva on account of his





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religious convictions, the instigator of the burning being Calvin, pastor of the cathedral in that city. This execution has roused many protests, especially in Italy and France. In answer to these protests, Calvin has just issued a book, which seems to be most adroitly tinted. The author's aim is to justify himself, to attack Servetus, and to prove that Servetus was rightly punished by death. I propose to subject this book to a critical examination. In accordance with his usual controversial manner, Calvin will probably describe me as one of Servetus's disciples, but I hope that no one will thereby be misled. I am not defending the theses of Servetus, but am attacking the false theses of Calvin. I leave absolutely unconsidered discussions about baptism, the Trinity, and such matters. I do not even possess a copy of Servetus's book, since Calvin has burned all the copies he could lay hands on and I therefore do not know what ideas Servetus put forward. I shall do no more than pillory the errors of Calvin as to points which have no bearing upon differences of principle; and I hope to make clear to every one what sort of man this is whom the lust for blood has driven crazy. I shall not deal with him as he dealt with Servetus, whom he committed to the flames, together with the books whose writing was deemed a crime – Servetus whom, even

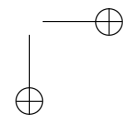


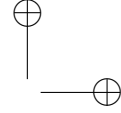
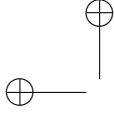


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now when he is dead, Calvin continues to revile. Calvin, having burned the man and his books, has the audacity to refer us to these books, quoting detached passages. It is as if an incendiary, having reduced a house to ashes, were then to invite us to inspect the furniture in the various rooms. For my own part I should never burn either an author or his books. The book I am attacking is open to every one, obtainable by every one, in either of two editions, one Latin and the other French. To avoid the possibility of objection, I shall, in the case of every citation, put the number of the paragraph from which it is taken, while my answer to each passage will bear the same number as the original.”

A discussion cannot be opened more frankly. In the aforesaid book, Calvin had unambiguously expounded his views; and Castellio uses this “exhibit” accessible to all, as an examining magistrate uses the depositions of an accused person. Word for word, Castellio reprints Calvin’s book, so that no one shall be able to say the critic has falsified or modified his adversary’s opinions; or that the critic has laid himself open to suspicion by having abbreviated Calvin’s text. Thus this second trial of Servetus’s case is much more just than had been the first trial in Geneva, when the accused had been kept in a dark and damp cell, denied wit-



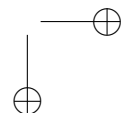
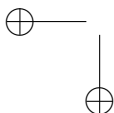


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nesses, and not allowed the services of defending counsel. Castellio was determined that the Servetus case should be discussed freely in its every detail by the whole humanist world; that its moral issues should be plainly brought to light.

There could be no dispute about certain essential facts. A man who, while the flames were devouring him, loudly proclaiming his innocence, had been cruelly executed at the instigation of Calvin and with the consent of the Genevese Town Council. Castellio goes on to ask the question: "What really was Miguel Servetus's offence? How could Jehan Calvin, who held no political office but only an ecclesiastical one, submit this purely theological affair to the municipal authorities? Had the municipal authorities of Geneva any right to sentence Servetus on account of the alleged crime? Finally, upon what authority, and in accordance with what law or statute, was this foreign theologian put to death in Geneva?"

As regards the first question, Castellio examines the minutes and Calvin's own utterances, in order to ascertain with what crime Miguel Servetus was charged. The only accusation Castellio can find is that Servetus "has impudently distorted the evangel, being driven thereto by an inexplicable longing for novelties." Thus the sole charge Calvin





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brings against Servetus is that the Spaniard interpreted the Bible independently and arbitrarily, leading him (Servetus) to other conclusions than those of which Calvin's ecclesiastical doctrine was the expression. Thereupon Castellio hits back. Did Servetus stand alone among the champions of the Reformation as regards such independent and arbitrary interpretations of the gospels? Who will venture to declare that if he did promulgate arbitrary interpretations, he was thereby departing from the true significance of the Reformation? Was not such individual interpretation one of the fundamental demands of the Reformation? What else did the leaders of the Evangelical Church busy themselves about than to establish a right to reinterpret Holy Writ? Had not Calvin himself, and Calvin's friend Farel, been the boldest and most resolute of all those who had endeavoured, in this way, to reconstruct the Church? "It is not merely that Calvin himself showed an extravagant zeal for innovations, but that he has done so much to impress them on others as to make contradiction dangerous. In the course of ten years he has made more innovations than the Catholic Church made in six centuries." Calvin, having himself been one of the boldest of the reformers, is not entitled to stigmatize as crime the making of new interpretations within the bounds of the Protestant Church.





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“Calvin, however, taking for granted his own infallibility, regards his views as right and the views of any one who may differ from him as wrong.” This brings Castellio to the second question: Who appointed Calvin judge concerning what is true and what is untrue? “Of course Calvin tells us that every writer who does not say ay to his ay, and no to his no, is an evilly disposed person. He therefore demands that those who differ from him shall be prevented, not only from writing, but also from speaking; the implication being that he alone is entitled to expound what he regards as right.” Now Castellio wishes to insist, once for all, that no man and no party is justified in saying: “We alone know the truth, and every opinion other than ours is erroneous.” All truths, and especially religious truths, are contestable and ambiguous. “It is presumptuous to decide with so much positiveness concerning mysteries which are understood by God alone, and to behave as if we were party to His most hidden designs. And it is no less arrogant to fancy we can attain certainty about such matters and can represent them clearly to our imagination, when in reality we know nothing at all about them.”

Since the world began, multifarious disasters have been the work of doctrinaires who intolerantly maintained their own views and opinions to





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be the only sound ones. It is these fanatics for the unification of thoughts and actions in accordance with their own model who, by self-glorification and contentiousness, trouble the peace of the world, transforming the natural juxtaposition of ideas into opposition and murderous disputes. Castelleo accused Calvin of such spiritual intolerance: "All the sects have founded their religions upon the word of God, and the members of each sect regard their own as being in exclusive possession of the truth. But, according to Calvin, one sect alone is right, and the others must accommodate themselves to it. Of course to Maitre Jehan Calvin his own doctrine seems true. But the leaders of other sects hold the same belief about their opinions. Calvin says that the others are wrong; but these others say that Calvin is wrong. Calvin wants to be supreme judge; so do the others. Who is to decide? At any rate, who appointed Calvin supreme arbiter with an exclusive right to inflict capital punishment? Upon what warranty does he base his monopolist position? On this, that he derives his justification from the word of God. But the others make the same claim. Or, perhaps, he assures us that his doctrine is incontestable. Incontestable in whose eyes? In his own, in Jehan Calvin's eyes. Why, then, does he write so many books, if the truth which he proclaims is obvious?"

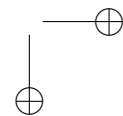




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Why has he never troubled to write a book in order to prove that murder or adultery is a crime? Because that is clear to every one. If Calvin has in fact unveiled the whole field of spiritual truth, why does not he allow others a little time in which to grasp the facts that are so clear to him? Why does he strike them to earth before they have had a chance, thus depriving them of the possibility to recognize truth as he sees it?"

Castellio hereby makes one decisive point. Calvin has arrogated to himself a position to which he is not entitled, the position of supreme arbiter in spiritual and religious matters. It behoved him, if he regarded Servetus's opinions as erroneous, to inform Servetus where he had gone astray. But instead of arguing reasonably and kindly, Calvin, without further ado, resorted to force. "You began by arresting your opponent, by locking Servetus up in prison, and you excluded from the trial all except those who were the Spaniard's enemies." Calvin had had recourse to the doctrinaire's usual practice. Whenever a doctrinaire finds that the argument is going against him, he closes his ears to his adversary's words and gags his adversary's mouth. Such a resort to censorship betrays a sense of insecurity in a person or in a doctrine. As if foreseeing his own fate, Castellio went on to speak of Calvin's moral responsibility. "Let me ask you





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a question, Monsieur Calvin. If you had gone to law with any one concerning a heritage, and your adversary was able to procure from the judge a ruling that he (the adversary) alone was entitled to speak, whilst you yourself were forbidden to utter a word, would you not instantly have protested against this injustice? Why do you do to others what you would not wish them to do unto you? We are engaged in a dispute about faith. Why, then, do you wish to close our mouths? Are you so firmly convinced of the weakness of your case? Are you so much afraid that the decision will go against you, and that you will forfeit your position as dictator?"

For a moment Castellio interrupts his plea in order to call a witness. A famous theologian will testify, as against the preacher Jehan Calvin, that the laws of God prohibit the use of force by the civil authorities to control exclusively spiritual offences. The great scholar, the famous theologian, who is now summoned to testify is Calvin himself, who, in this matter, enters the witness-box most unwillingly. "Inasmuch as Calvin finds that confusion prevails, he hastens to accuse others, lest he himself shall be suspected. Yet it is plain that one thing only has brought about the aforesaid confusion, namely, his attitude as a persecutor. The

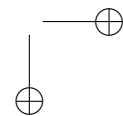




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judgment which, at his instigation, was passed on Servetus, aroused consternation and anger, not only in Geneva, but throughout the western world. Now he is trying to shift on to others' shoulders the blame for what he himself has done. But he sang another song when he himself was one of those who suffered persecution. At that time he wrote many pages inveighing against such persecutions. Lest any of my readers should doubt me, I will transcribe a passage from Calvin's *Institutio*."

The Calvin of 1554 would probably have sent to the stake the Calvin who wrote the words which Castellio goes on to quote. For in the *Institutio* he had written: "It is criminal to put heretics to death. To make an end of them by fire and sword is opposed to every principle of humanity." As soon as he gained supreme power Calvin had hastened to erase that appeal to humanity from his book. For in the second edition of the *Institutio*, the words just quoted have been sedulously modified. Just as Napoleon, when he became First Consul, was careful to buy up and destroy all obtainable copies of the Jacobin pamphlet of his youth, so the leader of the Genevese Church, having become a persecutor instead of remaining one of the persecuted, was eager to suppress all knowledge of his erstwhile appeal for moderation. But Castellio will not allow Calvin to run away



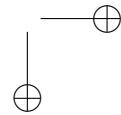
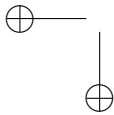


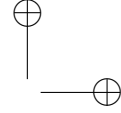
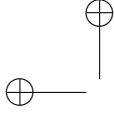
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from his own words. He reproduces them textually in his polemic. "Now," Castellio goes on, having finished the quotation, "let all my readers compare Calvin's original declaration with his writings and his deeds to-day, and it will become plain that his present and his past are as unlike one another as light and darkness. Because he has had Servetus put to death, he now wishes to execute in like manner all who differ from himself. He, the lawmaker, repudiates his own law, and demands the death penalty for dissentients. . . . Can we be surprised that Calvin wants to bring others down to death when he is afraid that they will disclose his instability and his mutations, thrusting these into the limelight? Those who act wrongly dread the clear light of day."

But clear light is what Castellio wants. He insists that it is incumbent upon Calvin to explain to the world why a sometime advocate of freedom of thought should have had Servetus burned alive at Champel. Inexorably, therefore, the trial is resumed.

Two questions have been settled. Dispassionate study of the facts has shown that Miguel Servetus's offence, if any, was committed on a purely spiritual plane; and, further, that the Spaniard's deviation from what Calvin regarded as a valid





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interpretation ought never to have been treated as ordinary crime. Why, then, asks Castello, did Calvin appeal, in a purely theoretical and abstract affair, to the secular powers in order to suppress an opinion that differed from his own? Between thinkers, differences must be settled by the instruments of thought alone. "If Servetus had taken up arms against you, you would have been entitled to call the Town Council to your aid. But since his only weapon against you was the pen, why did you attack his writings with fire and sword? Tell me, why did you get yourself backed up by the civil authorities?"

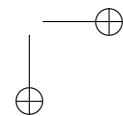
A State has no jurisdiction in matters of conscience. The Town Council has nothing to do with the defence of theological doctrines which are exclusively the concern of scholars. The business of the Town Council is to protect a scholar just as it protects a craftsman, a journeyman, a physician, or any other citizen to whom wrong has been done. Only if Servetus had tried to murder Calvin should the Town Council have been called upon to intervene in Calvin's defence. But since Servetus used nothing but rational arguments to further his attack on Calvin, Calvin should have defended himself by arguments and rational considerations. Castello incontrovertibly refutes Calvin's attempt to justify what he had done by appeal to a higher,





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a divine command; for Castellio holds it impossible that there can be a divine or Christian command to murder. Calvin appealed to the Mosaic law, which, he declared, commanded the use of fire and sword to extirpate unbelief. Castellio rejoins fiercely: "How, in God's name, will Calvin put into execution this law to which he appeals? It seems to me that in all towns he will have to destroy habitations, cattle, and furniture. If he should ever have enough military force at his disposal, he must attack France and all the other nations which harbour what he regards as heretical doctrines, must raze their cities to the ground, ill men, women, children, and even babes in the womb." Calvin, in his apologia, declared that the whole body of Christian doctrine would perish unless those whose mission it was to safeguard it, had courage enough to amputate a gangrenous limb. To which Castellio replied: "The severance of unbelievers from the Church is the concern of priests, who are entitled to excommunicate heretics and to expel them from the congregation, but not to put them to death." Nowhere in the gospels, nor yet in any moral treatise ever given to the world, was such intolerance demanded. "Will you dare, in the last resort, to say that Jesus Himself taught you to burn your fellow men?" Thus does Castellio thunder at Calvin who, "his hands dripping with





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the blood of Servetus,” had penned so preposterous an apologia. Since Calvin continued to declare he was forced to burn Servetus in defence of doctrine, forced to protect the word of God; since, again and again, like all who appeal to violence, he attempted to justify the use of violence with reference to some supra-personal interest – there now came, like a flash in the dark night of a most gloomy century, Castellio’s imperishable words: “To burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine, but slays a man. When the Genevese executed Servetus, they were not defending a doctrine, but sacrificing a man. We do not testify our own faith by burning another, but only by our readiness to be burned on behalf of our faith.”

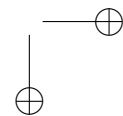
“To burn a man alive does not defend a doctrine, but slays a man.” How true and clear, how imperishable and humane is this aphorism. In a pithy phrase, Castellio passed judgment, once for all, upon the murderer of Servetus. Whatever logical, ethical, national, or religious pretext may be advanced to justify the execution of a human being, nothing can abrogate the personal responsibility of the executioner or instigator. There is always some particular person responsible for a deed of blood, and murder can never be condoned by abstract philosophical precepts. Truth can be diffused, but cannot be enforced. No doctrine be-





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comes sounder, no truth becomes truer, because of zealotry; nor can propaganda by deed exalt a doctrine or a truth. Still less does a doctrine or a philosophy become truer through the extirpation of individuals whose conscience compels them to deny that truth. Opinions and conceptions are individual experiences and events, subject to none except to the individual who holds them. They cannot be drilled or regulated. A truth may invoke the name of God a thousand times, may again and again proclaim itself sacrosanct, but that does not warrant it in destroying a God-given human life, which has a sanctity superior to that of any doctrine. Although to Calvin, dogmatic and partisan, it seems of no moment that perishable human beings should perish for the sake of imperishable ideas, Castelli holds that every man who suffers or is slain for the sake of his convictions is an innocent victim. Coercion in spiritual matters is not only a crime against the spirit, but also labour lost. "We must constrain no one, for coercion has never made any one better. Those who try to coerce persons into accepting a faith behave as foolishly as one who, with a stick, should thrust food into a sick man's mouth." An end, therefore, to the suppression of those who hold dissentient opinions. "Let your officers at length be deprived of authority to use force or to persecute. Give to

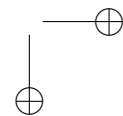




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every man the right to use the tongue and the pen freely (for this is what St. Paul meant when he said: ‘Ye may all prophesy. . . covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues’), and soon you will learn what wonders liberty will achieve when freed from coercion!”

The facts have been examined, the questions answered. Now Sebastian Castellio sums up and passes judgment in the name of outraged humanity. History has endorsed this judgment. A man named Miguel Servetus, searcher after God, “*un étudiant de la Sainte Escripiture,*” has been slain. Calvin is indicted, having been the instigator of the trial, and the Town Council of Geneva is charged with the actual commission of the crime. A spiritual re-hearing of a case has shown that both the aforesaid authorities, the ecclesiastical and the secular, exceeded their jurisdiction. The Town Council “has no warrant for passing judgment upon a spiritual offence.” Still more guilty is Calvin, who thrust this responsibility upon the municipal authorities. “Influenced by your testimony and by that of your accomplices, the Town Council put a man to death. But the Town Council was as incompetent to act or to distinguish in such a matter as a blind man is to distinguish colours.” Calvin is guilty twice over, guilty both of instigating and of executing the abominable deed. No matter what were the mo-

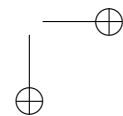




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tives which led him to thrust the unhappy Servetus into the flames, his action was monstrous. "You had Servetus executed, either because he thought what he said, or because, in accordance with his inward conviction, he said what he thought. If you slew him because he gave expression to his inward conviction, you killed him for speaking the truth, for even if what a man utters be erroneous, yet it is true if he only utters what he believes to be true. If, on the other hand, you had him put to death simply because his views were erroneous, then it was your duty to try, before taking such extreme measures, to win him over to what you regard as right views; or, quoting scripture to the purpose, to prove that you have no option but to order the execution of all who err, though they err in good faith." Calvin had, without justification, slain a dissentient, and was guilty, thrice guilty, of premeditated murder.

Guilty, guilty, guilty. As if with three blasts of a trumpet, Castellio's judgment is proclaimed to the world. Humaneness, the supreme moral authority, has decided. But what avails it, to save the honour of a dead man whom no posthumous atonement can recall to life? No, the essential thing now is to protect the living, by stigmatizing an act of inhumanity, so that countless similar acts may be averted. It is not the man Jehan Calvin alone

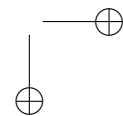




CONSCIENCE AGAINST VIOLENCE

who stands condemned. Calvin's book, with its ghastly doctrine of terror and suppression, must be declared inhuman. "Do you not see," Castellio asks the man on whom he has passed sentence, "whither your book and your actions are leading? Many maintain themselves to be defending God's honour. Henceforward 'God's defenders' who wish to slaughter human beings, will appeal to your testimony. Following the same disastrous path as you, they will, like yourself, imbrue their hands with gore. Like you, they will send to the scaffold those who hold other opinions than their own." It is not isolated fanatics who are so dangerous, but the evil spirit of fanaticism; not only autocratic, dogmatic, over-positive, and bloodthirsty persons need to be resisted by persons of free spirit, but any idea which calls Terror to its aid. Writing just before the opening of religious wars that were to last a hundred years, Castellio grows prophetic. "Even the most cruel of tyrants will not, with their cannon, shed so much blood as you have shed or will shed through your bloodthirsty conjurations – unless God take pity upon poor humanity, and open the eyes of princes and other rulers until they desist from their sanguinary work."

Even as Sebastian Castellio, gentle apostle of toleration, found it impossible to remain indifferent in view of the sufferings of the persecuted and the





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hunted, but was moved to raise his voice to God in a despairing prayer for more humaneness on earth – so, in the polemic I have been quoting, his voice thunders forth a curse upon all persons whose fanatical hatred makes them disturbers of the peace; and his book closes with a magnificent invocation: “This infamy of religious persecutions was already raging in the days of Daniel. Since the prophet’s enemies could find nothing assailable in his behaviour, they put their heads together in order to attack him through his convictions. The same thing is happening to-day. When people cannot discover anything to complain of in their enemy’s conduct, they take up the cudgels against his ‘doctrine’; and this is extremely adroit, seeing that the authorities, who have no opinion of their own, are all the easier to persuade. Thus the weak are oppressed by those who loudly appeal to the ‘sanctity of doctrine.’ Alas, their ‘sacred doctrine’ is one which Jesus will repudiate with loathing on the Day of Judgment, when He will hold assize upon conduct, not upon doctrine. When they say unto Him, ‘Lord, we were on Thy side, and acted in accordance with Thy teaching,’ He will answer: ‘Away with you, ye malefactors!’”





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Seldom has a spiritual despot been attacked more vigorously and perhaps never with so fulminant a passion than was Calvin in Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini*. Its essential truth and its clarity would, one might have imagined, teach even the most indifferent that freedom of thought under Protestantism and therefore the general freedom of European thinkers would be lost if they did not instantly rebel against Genevese dragooning. According to all earthly probability, it was to be expected that, after Castellio's flawless demonstration of the bearings of the trial and burning of Servetus, right-thinking persons throughout the western world would have endorsed the judgment. An adversary, in such a cause, overthrown by so formidable an onslaught, must surely have been defeated for all time, and Castellio's manifesto



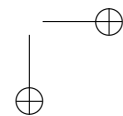


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could hardly fail to make an end of Calvin's uncompromising orthodoxy.

Yet nothing happened! This dazzling polemic, this splendid appeal for toleration, did not seem to produce the smallest effect; for the simplest and cruellest of reasons – because Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini* was not, at that date, allowed to go to press. On Calvin's instigation, the book was throttled by the censorship before it could voice its appeal to the conscience of Europe.

At the last moment, when transcripts were already being passed from hand to hand by the writer's intimates in Basle, the Genevese potentates, being well served by their spies, had learned how dangerous a challenge to their authority was about to be issued by Castellio. They struck instantly, and struck hard. Terrible, under such conditions, is the preponderance of a State organization as against an isolated individual. Calvin, who had committed the atrocity of burning Servetus alive because Servetus differed from him upon doctrinal points, was able, thanks to the one-way working of the censorship, to defend his atrocious deed unmolested; whereas Castellio, who wanted to protest in the name of humanity, was refused a hearing. True, the town of Basle had no reason for forbidding a free burgher, who was also a professor at the university, to engage in a literary polemic;





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but Calvin, a master tactician, pulled his wires skilfully. He worked through diplomatic channels. An official protest was made, not by Calvin as private citizen, but by the town of Geneva, against Castellio's proposed attack on "doctrine." Consequently the Town Council and the University of Basle were confronted with a painful choice; either they must abandon the cause of a free author, or else must maintain that cause in opposition to one of the mightiest of the federal States. As almost always happens, might prevailed over right, power over morality. It would be better, thought the prudent town councillors of Basle, to sacrifice an individual than to run their heads against a wall, so they issued a prohibition against the publication of any writings which were not strictly orthodox. This edict made it impossible for Castellio to publish his *Contra libellum Calvini*; and enabled Calvin to exclaim gleefully: "*Il va bien que les chiens qui aboient derrière nous ne nous peuvent mordre.*"

Even as Servetus had been silenced by blazing faggots, so now was Castellio silenced by the censorship; and once again "authority" was maintained by terror. Castellio's sword-arm had been smitten off; the writer could no longer write. Nay, worse than this, he had been deprived of the power of defending himself, when his triumphant adversary hit back with redoubled wrath against the





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man who had not been permitted to deliver his blow. Almost a century was to elapse before *Contra libellum Calvinii* could be printed. What Castellio wrote in this pamphlet had a prophetic ring: “Why do you do to others that which you would not endure if done to yourself? We are concerned with a dispute about religious matters; why, then, do you gag your adversaries?”

Against a reign of terror there is no appeal. In gloomy resignation, Castellio had perforce to submit. None the less, there is some consolation for the oppressed during epochs in which force prevails over mind, and that is the sovereign contempt the vanquished can show for the victor. “Your words and your weapons are only those common to every despotism; and they can but give you a temporal, not a spiritual dominance; a dominance based upon coercion, and not upon the love of God. Nor do I envy you your power and your weapons. I have other powers and other weapons – an imperturbable conviction of innocence, and trust in Him who will help me and give me grace. Even if, for a season, truth is suppressed by the blind ‘justice’ of this world, no one can permanently coerce truth. Let us cease to heed the judgment of a world which slew Christ: let us ignore an assize before which only the cause of violence proves victorious. The kingdom of God is not of this world.”

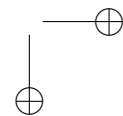




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Once more terror had gained the upper hand. Worse still, Calvin's temporal power was actually intensified by his crimes. It is fruitless, in the annals of history, to seek for the poetic justice of the story books. We have to accommodate ourselves to the fact that history, being a reflexion of the Pantheos, is neither moral nor immoral in its doings. It neither punishes evil nor rewards good. Since it is based, not upon right, but on might, it usually assigns victory to men of might; unrestrained boldness and brutal decisions do, as a rule, in temporal matters, bring advantage rather than disadvantage to the doers or misdoers.

Calvin, having been attacked for his unfeeling severity, realized that only one thing could save him – yet more severity and a yet more relentless use of force. Again and again in history, we can trace the working of the law that one who has appealed to force must use force to the bitter end, and one who has established a reign of terror must intensify terror to frightfulness. The opposition to Calvin during and after the trial of Servetus only confirmed him in his opinion that for an authoritarian ruler the forcible suppression and unqualified intimidation of his adversaries, the ruthless crushing of opposition, was the only way of stabilizing totalitarian power. At first Calvin had been content to paralyse the republican minority in the

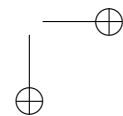




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Genevese Town Council by a manipulation of votes. At each successive sitting of that body, additional Protestant refugees from France, men materially and morally dependent upon himself, were granted the privileges of citizenship in Geneva, being thus given the vote. Thereby the opinion of the Town Council was moulded in his favour. Official positions were packed with his adherents; and the influence of the republican party was sedulously undermined. Though patriotic Genevese of the old school were not slow to perceive that foreigners were being systematically preferred, the uneasiness of those democrats who had shed their blood on behalf of the liberties of Geneva was aroused too late. They held secret meetings, to discuss how they could save the last vestiges of independence from the clutches of the Puritans. The public mood grew more and more strained. Street brawls between native-born and immigrants became frequent. The injuries that resulted were not serious, only two persons being bruised by stones.

Calvin, however, had merely been waiting for a pretext. He was now able to carry out a *coup d'état* which he had long been preparing. These small bickerings were magnified into a "terrible conspiracy," which was said to have been frustrated "by God's grace alone." The dictator struck one blow after another, arresting the leaders of the





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republican party, who had had nothing whatever to do with the disturbances. They were racked until the dictator possessed the evidence he required to support his assertion that a massacre had been planned by his opponents. Calvin and his supporters were to have been killed, and foreign troops brought into the city. "Confessions" of this alleged plot having been gained by the most atrocious cruelty, and "treason" having been "proved," the executioner could begin his work. All who had resisted Calvin even in the most trifling way were put to death. Those alone escaped who fled from Geneva. When "justice" had been done, the only political party remaining in the city was Calvin's.

Having purged Geneva of dissentients, Calvin might have been carefree, and therefore magnanimous. But, since the days of Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plutarch, all readers of history and biography have been aware that victorious oligarchs tend to become harsher than ever. The eternal tragedy of despots is that they continue to fear persons of independent mind even when these have been disarmed and gagged. The very fact that a crushed adversary says nothing, but refuses to enrol himself among the toadies and servants of the tyrant, makes his continued existence a source of irritation. Now that Calvin had rid himself of





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all his political opponents save one, the theocrat's wrath was intensified by concentration upon this one man, Sebastian Castellio.

Yet it would not be so easy to make an effective onslaught upon Castellio unless he could be induced to break his discreet silence. He had grown weary of open quarrel. Humanists of the Erasmian type are rarely persistent fighters. The customary methods of the partisan, with his unceasing hunt for proselytes, seem to them unworthy of an intelligent man. Having testified to the truth, they feel that it would be a work of supererogation to reiterate their protest. They are rarely propagandists. In the Servetus affair, Castellio had said his say; he had done his best to defend the memory of the martyred Spaniard and had condemned more energetically than any other man of his day the use of violence to subdue conscience. But the times were unfavourable; and he could not fail to see that force would remain in the saddle for an indefinite period. He therefore resolved to wait until the battle between toleration and intolerance could be resumed under more favourable auspices. Disappointed, but with his conviction unshaken, he returned to his studies. Basle University had at length appointed him professor; and he had nearly finished what he regarded as his most important task in life, the translation of the Bible into Latin

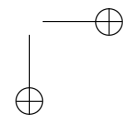




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and French. During the years 1555 and 1556, he desisted from polemic writing.

But Calvin and the Genevese were informed by spies that, within the immediate circle of his friends at the university, he continued to promulgate humanist views. Though his hands were tied, he was still free to speak; and the crusaders of intolerance grew infuriated when they noted that his irrefutable arguments against the doctrine of predestination secured wider and wider acceptance among the students. A man whose strength is predominantly moral exerts an influence by the mere fact that he exists, for his essence diffuses itself in ever-widening circles, spreading his convictions as ripples spread when a stone is flung into a pool. Since Castellio would not bend, he must be broken. A trap was baited, to lure him back on to the battlefield of "heresy." One of his colleagues at the university was found ready and willing to act as provocative agent. This man sent a friendly letter, couched in terms which implied that the question was purely theoretical, asking Castellio to expound his views with regard to the doctrine of predestination. Castellio agreed to a public debate, but had hardly opened his mouth when one of the audience rose and accused him of heresy. Castellio was quick to realize what was afoot. Instead of springing the trap by defending himself, and thus





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giving his adversaries justification for their charge, he broke off the discussion, and his colleagues at the university would not allow any further steps to be taken against him. Geneva, however, refused to be discouraged. The first trick having failed, recourse was had to another. Subsequent challenges to public debate being ignored, rumours were circulated and pamphlets issued, in the hope of goading Castellio into the open. His enemies made mock of his translation of the Bible; he was denounced as the author of anonymous libels; the most abominable calumnies were disseminated: as if at the word of command, a storm was raised against him from every quarter of the compass.

The ubiquity and the excesses of the zealots made it clear to all unbiased humanists that an attempt was to be made upon the body and the life of this distinguished and pious scholar, now that he had been deprived of freedom of speech. The venomousness of the persecution brought him much friendly support. Melanchthon, the doyen of the German Reformation, ostentatiously came to the front as one of Castellio's backers. As Erasmus in earlier days, so Melanchthon now was nauseated by the spleen of those for whom the meaning of life was to be found, not in reconciliation but in quarrels. He addressed a letter to Sebastian Castellio, writing: "Hitherto I have refrained from





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corresponding with you, being overwhelmed with work. An additional reason for my silence has been my profound regret to notice how grave are the misunderstandings among the friends of wisdom and virtue. Nevertheless, I have always greatly esteemed you because of the way in which you write. This letter of mine is to convey evidence of my general agreement and proof of my earnest sympathy. I trust we shall be united in eternal friendship.

“Your justified complaints, not only as to the differences of opinion that prevail, but also as to the savagery with which certain persons attack the friends of truth, have intensified a sorrow which continually afflicts me. According to classical legend, the giants rose out of the blood of the titans. In like manner, the new sophists who try to reign at courts, in families, and among the masses, and who believe scholars to be a hindrance to their aims, have sprung from the seed of the monks. But God will know how to protect the remnants of His flock.

“Like sages we must endure that which we cannot alter. I find age an alleviation to my distress. I look forward, ere long, to entering the Heavenly Church and to being far removed from the raging storms which so cruelly agitate the Church here





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below. If I am spared, I shall enjoy discussing many things with you. Farewell.”

Melanchthon’s hope, in writing as above to Castellio, was that his letter (speedily to be diffused in numerous transcripts) would help to protect Castellio, and would serve as a warning to Calvin to desist from his crazy persecution of that great scholar. Unquestionably, Melanchthon’s words of recognition had an effect throughout the humanist world; and even some of Calvin’s intimates advised him to make peace. For instance, the famous scholar and theologian François Baudouin wrote to Geneva: “You can now realize what Melanchthon thinks of the bitterness with which you persecute this man; and also how far Melanchthon is from approving your paradoxes. Is there any sense in your continuing to describe Castellio as a second Satan, while simultaneously honouring Melanchthon as an angel?”

It is, however, futile to attempt to teach or appease a fanatic. Strangely (or logically) enough, Melanchthon’s letter acted by contraries on Calvin, whose animus against Castellio was intensified by Melanchthon’s championship. Calvin knew only too well that these pacifist intellectuals were more dangerous to his militant dictatorship than were Rome, Loyola, and the members of the Society of Jesus. As regards the latter group of adver-





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saries, it was a case of dogma against dogma, word against word, doctrine against doctrine; but in Castellio's demand for liberty he felt there was involved an attack upon the fundamental principle of his own activities, upon the very idea of unified authority, upon the essential significance of orthodoxy; and, in warfare, a pacifist in the ranks of the commander-in-chief's army is more to be feared than enemies in the open field. For the very reason, therefore, that Melanchthon's letter enhanced Castellio's prestige, Calvin's one desire, henceforward, was to destroy Castellio utterly. The war was a war to the knife.

Just as, in the Servetus affair, when the campaign became a campaign of annihilation, Calvin thrust aside his man of straw, Nicolaus de la Fontaine, and drew his own sword, so now, when he proposed to inflict a crushing blow, he dismissed his hodman de Bèze. He was no longer concerned with right or wrong, with Holy Writ and its interpretation, with truth or falsehood, but only with the speedy destruction of Castellio. Yet, at the moment, he could think of no adequate reason for attacking Castellio, who had retired from controversy to resume his learned labours. Since there was no warrant, one must be manufactured, haphazard, at all risks. Any cudgel would do with which to batter the detested Castellio. Calvin





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seized as his excuse an anonymous lampoon which his spies found in the luggage of a travelling merchant. There was not a shadow of evidence that Castellio was its author; and, indeed, Castellio was not. But, having decided "*Carthaginem esse delendam*" – that Castellio was to be annihilated – Calvin, with rabid and vulgar abuse, fathered the authorship on Castellio. Calvin's polemic *Calumniae nebulonis cujusdam*, was not a seemly discussion by one theologian of the views of another, but an outburst of frenzy, wherein, in language unworthy of a drunken bargee, Castellio was reviled as a thief, a rascal, a blasphemer. The professor of the University of Basle was accused of having stolen firewood in broad daylight. The savage opusculum, growing more scurrilous from page to page, ended with the wrathful outcry: "May God destroy you, Satan!"

Calvin's defamatory pamphlet may be regarded as one of the most notable examples of the way in which partisan rancour can debase a man of outstanding intelligence and literary mastership. It can also serve as a warning to statesmen, showing them how foolishly they may behave when they fail to bridle their emotions. Moved by its sense of the terrible wrong here inflicted upon an honourable man, the senate of the University of Basle annulled





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its previous decision to forbid the publication of Castellio's writings. A university of high standing in Europe did not think it tolerable that one of its stipendiary professors should be accused before the humanist world of being a thief, a rogue, and a vagabond. Since manifestly such accusations had nothing to do with a discussion of "doctrine," but were mere vulgar defamation, Castellio was expressly authorized by the senate to make a public rejoinder.

Castellio's reply is an admirable example of humanist polemic. He was so tolerant a man that his adversaries' hatred could not poison his mind, nor could any baseness on their part render him base. A distinguished calm breathes through the opening periods. "Not with enthusiasm do I enter this path of public discussion. I should have greatly preferred to come to a brotherly understanding with you, in the spirit of Christ, and not to adopt this boorish method of mutual accusations, which cannot fail to injure the prestige of our Church. But since you and your friends have frustrated my dream of peaceful collaboration, it seems to me incompatible with my duty as a Christian to abstain from answering your passionate onslaught, with all due moderation." Castellio went on to expose the crookedness of Calvin's methods, for Calvin, in the first edition of the *Calumniae*, pub-

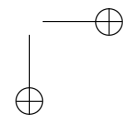




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licly asserted that Castellio was the author of the aforesaid anonymous pamphlet; but in his second edition, the Genevese dictator, having been by that time doubtless convinced of error, withdrew the charge, letting the matter go by default, without any frank admission that he had accused Castellio unjustly. Castellio, however, nailed the lie to the counter: "Yes or no. Were you aware that you had no warrant for naming me as author of that pamphlet? How can I tell? But either you brought your accusation at a time when you already knew that it was unjustified; in that case, you were cheating. Or else you were still uncertain; and then your charge was heedlessly brought. In either event, your behaviour was unworthy, for every point of your contention is false. I did not write that pamphlet, nor did I send it to be printed in Paris. If its diffusion was a criminal offence, the crime was yours, for it was through you that the writing first became widely known."

Having shown how threadbare had been Calvin's pretext for attacking him, Castellio turned to pilory the unpolished form of the invective. "You have an ample store of abusive terms at your command, and, speaking out of the fulness of your heart, you have let your tongue run away with you. In your Latin tract you call me, without drawing breath, blasphemer, calumniator, malefactor, yap-





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ping cur, an impudent wretch full of ignorance and bestiality, an impious misreader of Holy Writ, a fool who mocks at God, a despiser of the faith, a man without shame, a dirty dog, a being full of disrespect and obnoxiousness, a distorted and perverted spirit, a vagabond, and a '*mauvais sujet*.' Eight times you call me a rascalion (at least that I take to be the meaning you attach to the word '*nebulo*'). These malicious terms are the ones you delight in interspersing through two sheets of printed matter, while you have chosen as title of your book *Calumnies of a Rascalion*. Its last sentence runs: 'May God destroy you, Satan!' From the title to the conclusion, the whole work is penned in the same style, although the author is reputed to be a man inspired by apostolic earnestness, by Christian gentleness. Woe unto those whom you lead, if they are infected by such moods, and if it should prove that your disciples resemble their master. But these invectives do not touch me in the least. . . . Some day truth will prevail, and you, Calvin, will have to account to God for the abuse you have showered on one to save whom, as to save yourself, Christ died. Is it possible that you are not ashamed, that you cannot remember Jesus's own words: 'Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever shall





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say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council'?" Serenely, now, uplifted by a sovereign sense of inviolability, Castellio went on to defend himself against Calvin's most serious accusation, that he, Castellio, had stolen firewood in Basle. "Certainly," he writes ironically, "it would be a grave offence if I had committed it. But calumny is an equally serious matter. Let us assume that the charge is true, and that I really stole wood because I, in the terms of your doctrine, was predestined to do so. Why should you revile me on that account? Should you not rather have compassion on me because God foreordained me to such a fate, and therefore made it impossible that I should not steal? If that be so, why should you fill the heavens with outcries and denunciations? To prevent my stealing any more? But if I am a thief because of divine predestination, you must in your writings acquit me of blame, since I act under coercion. On your own showing I could as little refrain from theft as, by taking thought, add a cubit to my stature."

Having thus made merry over Calvin's preposterous accusation, Castellio went on to explain upon what a slender foundation the charge had been built up. Like hundreds of others, during a freshet in the Rhine, he had with a grappling-hook hauled driftwood out of the river. This was permissible,

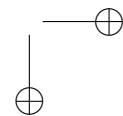




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for not only was driftwood treasure-trove to any one, but the citizens of Basle were, by the town authorities, especially invited to retrieve it, since, when the river was in flood, floating logs were a peril to the bridges. Castellio was in a position to prove that the Basle municipal authorities had paid him, and certain other “thieves,” a reward of “quaternos solidos” (a respectable sum of money) for having committed the “theft.” After reading this rebuttal, even the zealots of Geneva made no further attempts to revive a ridiculous calumny which dishonoured, not Castellio, but Calvin.

No mendacity, and no attempt to gloss over the matter, could save Calvin’s face. The dictator, eager to do anything in his power that would sweep a political enemy out of the way, had tampered with the truth just as he had done in the Servetus affair. Castellio’s character was unspotted. “Let those judge who please to do so,” he wrote to Calvin. “I fear no man’s opinion, if he judge without bias or hatred. Those who have known me since childhood know that I have always lived in needy circumstances, as numberless persons can testify. Must I call witnesses? Do you not yourself know what my life has been? Your own pupils have had ample opportunity of recognizing that no one can entertain the least doubt as to the uprightness of my behaviour. This being so, the



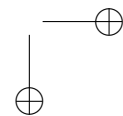


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only charge they can bring against me is that my doctrine does not coincide with yours, and that therefore I must be in error. But how can you dare to diffuse such scandalous reports about me, and to call upon God's name in this connection? Do you not see, Calvin, how terrible it is to call God to bear witness on behalf of accusations which are inspired exclusively by hate and anger?

"I, too, can call upon God; and since you have called upon Him in order to support your reckless accusations against me, I appeal to Him because you have accused me unjustly. If I am lying and you are speaking the truth, then I pray that God will punish me according to the measure of my transgression, and I beg my fellowmen to deprive me of life and honour. But if I have spoken the truth and you are a false accuser, I pray that God will shield me against the pitfalls set by an adversary. I also pray that before your death He will give you opportunity of repenting your conduct, that the sin you have committed may not imperil your salvation."

How different is the tone from Calvin's; the tone of a free-spirited and unprejudiced man as against the tone of a man congealed in self-assurance. Eternal is the contrast between the disposition of the humanist and that of the doctrinaire, between the

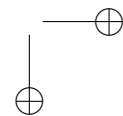




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nonchalant man whose only desire is to maintain his right to have his own opinion, and the positive-minded authoritarian who can never rest till all the world has said ditto to himself. A man whose conscience is pure and clear speaks moderately, but the zealot spouts threats and hatred. There can be no clarity in a mind clouded by hate. Truly spiritual deeds cannot be performed by a fanatic, and are only at the command of one who, in silence and calm, has learned self-control and moderation.

Partisans, however, are never concerned with justice, but only with victory. They never want to concede another's point, but only to uphold their own. As soon as Castellio's rejoinder appeared, the assault on him was renewed. True, personal abuse of the "dog," the "beast" Castellio, and the absurd fable as to the theft of wood, were quietly withdrawn. Even Calvin did not dare continue cutting into this kerf. Hastily the line of attack was transferred to the theological field. Once more the Genevese printing presses were set in motion, and for the second time Théodore de Bèze was sent into the breach. More loyal to his master than to truth, in the official Genevese edition of the Bible (1558) he prefaced Holy Writ with so malicious an attack on Castellio that, in such a setting, it reads like blasphemy. "Satan, our old opponent," writes de Bèze, "having recognized that he cannot, as of





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yore, arrest the progress of God's word, uses even more dangerous methods. For a long time, there was no French translation of the Bible, or at least no translation worthy of the name. Now Satan has found as many translators as there are frivolous and impudent minds; and he will probably find even more, unless God give them pause before it is too late. If the reader asks me for an example, let me refer to Sebastian Castellio's translation of the Bible into Latin and French – Castellio being a man whose name is well known to our Church because of his ingratitude and impudence, and also because so much trouble has been taken in the vain endeavour to keep him on the right path. We therefore regard it as a conscientious duty to break the silence we have hitherto kept, and to warn all Christians against this man, the chosen of Satan."

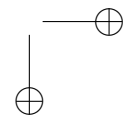
It would be difficult to denounce a scholar in plainer terms as a heretic. Castellio, however, "chosen of Satan," need no longer keep silence. Encouraged by Melanchthon's letter, the senate of the university had restored the persecuted man's freedom of expression. Castellio's answer to de Bèze is profoundly, one might almost say mystically, sad. He can only feel sorrowful that men who profess devotion to the things of the spirit should surrender to such uncontrolled hatred. He





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knew well enough that the Calvinists were not trying to spread truth, but only to maintain the monopolist position of their own doctrines; and that they would not rest until they had swept him out of their path, as they had previously swept theoretical and political adversaries. For his part, he refused to descend into such abysses of hate. "You are inciting the authorities to compass my death," he wrote prophetically. "Were it not that your books make this plain to all who read them, I should never venture such an allegation, however convinced I may be of its truth. You know that as soon as I am dead, it will be impossible for me to answer you. You find my continued existence a nightmare. Since you perceive that the authorities will not yield, or at any rate have not yet yielded to your pressure, you try to make me generally hated, and to discredit me in the eyes of the world." Though he was absolutely assured that his enemies sought his life, Castellio was satisfied to appeal to their consciences. "Tell me, please," he said to these professed servants of Christ, "in what respect can you justify your attitude towards me by an appeal to Jesus? Even when Judas was handing Him over to the myrmidons of authority, Jesus spoke in kindly tones to His false disciple, and, on the cross, He prayed for those who were putting Him to death. But what are you doing? Because





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I differ from you in respect of certain doctrines and shades of opinion, you persecute me wherever I may be, and urge others to treat me no less despitefully than you do yourselves. How bitter it must be to you, in the depths of your hearts, to know that such conduct as yours received His unqualified condemnation. For instance: ‘Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.’ These are simple truths, accessible in the Scriptures to those who consult the sacred writings with minds freed from theological distortion. You yourselves pay lip-service with spoken words and in your books. Why do you not apply the same doctrine in your daily lives?”

Castellio knew well enough that de Bèze was only an underling sent as forerunner. Calvin, despot in the realm of conscience as well as in the real world, was the true source of the murderous hatred clamouring for Castellio’s destruction. Castellio, therefore, ignoring de Bèze, addressed himself directly to Calvin. “You style yourself a Christian, you appeal to the gospels, you take your stand upon God’s word, and boast that your mind is wholly devoted to fulfilling God’s intentions. You believe yourself well acquainted with evangelical truth. But if you would teach others, why do you not begin with teaching yourself? How do you dare fulminate from the pulpit against those who

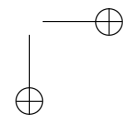




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bear false witness, when your own writings are continually bearing false witness? Why, apparently in the hope of breaking my pride, do you condemn me with as much arrogance and self-assurance as if you were sitting at God's right hand and He had revealed to you all the secrets of His heart? Look within, before it is too late. Try, if it be still possible, to doubt your own all-sufficingness for a moment, and then you may be able to see what many others see. Rid yourself of the self-love which consumes you, and of the hatred you feel for so many persons, especially myself. Let us vie with one another in kindly consideration, and then you will discover that my alleged impiety is no less unreal than was the disgraceful offence which you tried to fix upon me. Put up with my diverging from you a little in matters of doctrine. Is it impossible that two pious persons may have differences of opinion, and yet be at one in their hearts?"

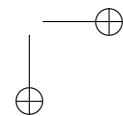
Surely no one attacked by doctrinaires and zealots, has ever answered them in a more humane and conciliatory spirit? This is no mere matter of words, for Castellio is himself a living example of toleration in the struggle which has been forced on him. Instead of answering scorn with scorn, hatred with hatred, he writes: "I know of no country to which I could have fled if I had brought such





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charges against you as you have brought against me,” going on to renew his attempt at such a kindly settlement of the dispute as, in his view, a dispute between intellectuals should always have. Once more he holds out the hand of peace and friendship, although his opponents are sharpening the axe for his neck. “For the love of Christ I implore you to respect my liberty, and cease to overwhelm me with false accusations. Let me preserve my own faith uncoerced, as you preserve yours with my full approval. Do not continue to believe that he who differs from you must be wrong, and deserves to be burnt as a heretic. . . . When I see how so many other pious persons interpret Holy Writ in different ways from yourself, it makes me turn with more devotion to my own faith in Christ. Unquestionably one of us two must be mistaken, but that need not prevent our loving one another. The Master will some day guide the strayed sheep back into the right path. The only thing either of us certainly knows (or ought to know) is the duty of Christian charity. Let us practise this, and by practising it close our adversaries’ mouths. You believe your opinions to be right. Others believe the same of their opinions. Well, let the wisest among us show themselves the most brotherly. Let us not pride ourselves on our own wisdom. God knows all; and we must remember that He ‘hath





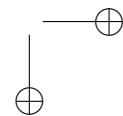
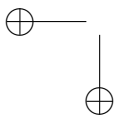
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put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree.’

“I penned these words when my heart was filled with desire for love. I offer you love and a Christian peace. I appeal to you to show love towards me, calling God and the Holy Ghost to witness that I do so out of the depths of my heart.

“If, despite all I can do, you continue to attack me with hatred in your heart, if I cannot persuade you to love me as a Christian should love his brother, I can only keep silence. May God be our judge, deciding between you and me in accordance with the degree to which we have served Him faithfully.”

It seems almost incredible that so moving an appeal for reconciliation should have been fruitless. But one of the contradictions of our mortal nature is that ideologues, being in thrall to one narrow idea, are blind to all other ideas, and therefore cannot be moved by such appeals, humane though they be. Bias in thought inevitably leads to injustice in action; and when a man or a nation is a prey to the fanaticism of restricted outlook, there is no space for mutual understanding and toleration. Castellio’s moving appeal made no impression whatever upon Calvin. What was it but the appeal of a man eager for peace, who



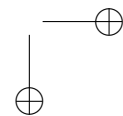


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did not preach in public, did not dispute, had no desire to impose his own views by force on any other living person? The pious Genevese pastor rejected as “monstrous” this appeal to Christian peace. All he did was to start a new devil’s tattoo against Castellio, reinforced by the poison gases of contempt and incitation. Another lie was launched, in the hope of exposing Castellio to suspicion or at least to ridicule. Perhaps this was the most perfidious of all Calvin’s onslaughts. Although attendance at dramatic performances was regarded as a sin in Geneva, in the Genevese seminary Calvin’s disciples staged a “pious” school comedy in which Castellio, under the thin disguise *De parvo Castello*, appeared as Satan’s chief servant, and in which he was made to say:

*Quant à moy, un chacun je sers
Pour argent en prose oy en vers
Aussi ne vis-je d’aultre chose. . . .*

This gross calumny, that a man whose life had been passed in apostolic poverty had sold his pen, and that the advocate of toleration was a salaried agitator on behalf of the papacy, was voiced by permission, nay, by encouragement of the leaders in Geneva. But the rancour of the Calvinists had long since made them unable to distinguish between truth and calumny. All they cared about was





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getting Castellio deprived of his professorial chair at Basle, seeing to it that his writings should be burned, and, if possible, himself burned as well.

These good haters were now favoured by fortune. During one of the customary house-to-house visitations in Geneva, two burghers were found conning a book which lacked Calvin's *imprimatur*. There was no author's name on the title-page or colophon, nor any place of publication mentioned. But all the more for that did the opuscle, *Conseil à la France désolée*, smell of heresy. The two readers were promptly brought before the Consistory. Dreading thumbscrew and rack, they hastened to acknowledge that one of Castellio's nephews had lent them this *Conseil*. Impetuously the hunters followed up the fresh trail, hoping, at last, to bring their quarry to bay.

In very truth the book, "evil, because crammed with errors," was a new work by Castellio. He had lapsed into his old "error." Incurable, it seemed, was his Erasmian desire for a peaceful settlement of the conflict that raged within the Church. He could not remain silent when, in his beloved France, religious persecution was beginning to reap a bloody harvest, and when the Protestants, incited by the Genevese, were taking up arms against the Catholics. As if he could foresee the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and the horrors of the Huguenot





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wars, he felt impelled, at the eleventh hour, to demonstrate the futility of such bloodshed. Not one doctrine, nor the other, he explained, was, in itself, erroneous; but invariably false and criminal was the attempt to constrain a man to a belief he did not hold. All the evil on earth arose out of this “*forcement des consciences*”; continually renewed was the bloodthirsty attempt of narrow-minded fanatics to impose constraints upon conscience. However, as Castellio goes on to show, it is not only immoral and illegal to try and constrain any one to avow acceptance of a belief to which he is opposed; but it is also foolish, nonsensical. Such a press-gang to gather in recruits for the support of a philosophy or a creed can only secure hypocrites. The thumbscrew, the rack, or any other such constraint, achieves no more than a nominal increase in the membership of a party. Proselytes are gained at the cost of a mathematical falsification whereby genuine adherents are deceived as well as the outer world. Castellio writes, in words that are universally applicable: “Those who wish to win over the largest possible number of supporters willy-nilly, resemble a fool who has a barrel containing only a little wine, and fills it up with water in order to have more wine. The result is, not to increase the wine, but to spoil the good wine which the fool already had. It is preposterous to





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assert that those who are forced to profess a belief, really believe what they profess. Were they free to follow their own inclinations they would say: ‘What I sincerely believe is that you are unjust and tyrannical, and that what you have compelled me to profess is false.’ Bad wine is not made good by forcing people to drink it.”

Again and again, therefore, and ever more vigorously, does Castellio reaffirm his conviction that intolerance will inevitably lead to war, and that only through toleration can peace be achieved. A philosophy or a religion cannot be established by thumbscrews, battle-axes, and big guns, but only by influencing individuals to accept a conviction without constraint; by true understanding alone can wars be avoided and ideas linked together. Let us, therefore, leave those to be Protestants who wish to be Protestants, and those to remain Catholics who are honestly so disposed, trying to constrain neither one set of persons nor the other. A generation before the rival creeds were reconciled at Nantes over the tombs of myriads who had been senselessly sacrificed, a lonely and distressful humanist foreshadowed the edict which was to establish toleration in France. “My counsel to you, France, is that you should cease the constraint, the persecution, and the murder of conscience, and,



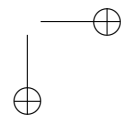


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instead of that, you should allow every one who believes in Christ to do so in his own way.”

It need hardly be said that in Geneva a proposal to reconcile French Catholics and French Protestants was regarded as a heinous crime. At that very moment, Calvin was secretly trying to incite the French Huguenots to take up arms. Nothing could be less accordant with his aggressive ecclesiastical policy than Castellio’s humanist and pacifist proposals. The dictator pulled all possible strings to secure the suppression of Castellio’s *Conseil*. Messengers were speeded to every point of the compass, bearing hortatory letters to the Protestant authorities. So effective was Calvin’s organization, that in August, 1563, at the General Synod of the Reformed Churches, a resolution was passed as follows: “The Church is hereby informed of the appearance of a book entitled *Conseil à la France désolée* penned by Castellio. This is an extremely dangerous work, and the faithful are warned to be on their guard against it.”

Once more the zealots succeeded in suppressing a “dangerous” work by Castellio before it had been circulated. Yes, the book was suppressed, but what about the author, this imperturbable, inflexible, anti-dogmatic and anti-doctrinaire philosopher? An end must be made of him. Gagging

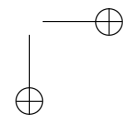


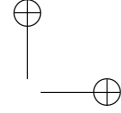
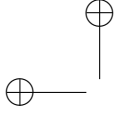


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was not enough; his spine must be broken. Once more Théodore de Bèze was called in to use the garotte. His *Responsio ad difensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis*, dedicated to the pastors of the town of Basle, showed (if by this dedication alone) what sort of steps were to be taken against Castellio. "It is time, and more than time," such was de Bèze's insinuation, "that religious justice shall deal with this heretic and friend of heretics." In a spate of defamatory language, the pious theologian pilloried Castellio as a liar, blasphemer, wicked Anabaptist, desecrator of sacred doctrine, stinking sycophant, protector, not only of all heretics, but likewise of all adulterers and criminals. To conclude, he was stigmatized as an assassin whose weapons of defence had been forged in Satan's smithy. True, de Bèze, in his fury, mixed his opprobrious epithets so indiscriminately that many of them cancelled one another out. Still, what clearly emerged from this volcanic tumult was the determination to gag Castellio once for all, if possible by taking his life.

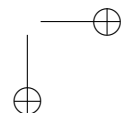
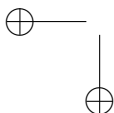
The fanatics had plainly disclosed their intention to have Castellio put on trial for heresy; the denunciation stepped shamelessly into the open, without a fig leaf. A plain appeal had been made to the Basle synod to set the civil authorities straightway to work. Castellio was to be arrested as a public en-





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emy. Unfortunately, however, there was a trifling obstacle to prevent the immediate carrying out of this amiable intention. By the laws of Basle, a prosecution could not be opened without a written indictment having been laid before the authorities, and the mere existence of a disapproved book would not suffice. In these circumstances, the obviously proper course would be for Calvin and de Bèze to bring the charge against Castellio. But Calvin followed his well tried tactics, preferring to remain in the background while urging others to step into the breach. The method adopted against Servetus in Vienne and in Geneva would be the most appropriate. In November, 1563, immediately after de Bèze's book had been published, a completely unqualified person, Adam von Bodenstein by name, brought before the Basle authorities a written plaint against Castellio on the ground of heresy. Assuredly this Adam von Bodenstein was the last man entitled to assume the role of defender of orthodoxy, being a son of the notorious Karlstadt, whom Luther had expelled from the university of Wittenberg, as a dangerous fanatic; besides, being a pupil of the distinctly irreligious Paracelsus, it was absurd for him to pose as an upright pillar of the Protestant Church. Nevertheless Bodenstein's indictment reiterated the confused arguments of de Bèze's book, wherein Castellio



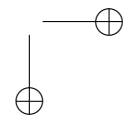


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was simultaneously described as a Papist, an Anabaptist, a free thinker, a blasphemer, and, in addition, a protector of adulterers and criminals. No matter whether the charges were true or false; with the lodging of this written accusation (which is still extant) the legal requirements had been fulfilled. Now the Basle authorities had no other choice than to initiate a prosecution, Calvin and company had secured their aim; Castellio must sit on the penitent's form.

Surely it would be easy for Castellio to defend himself against the aforesaid accusations? In excess of zeal, Bodenstein had charged him with such contradictory offences that the absurdity of the indictment was manifest. Besides, every one in Basle knew Castellio's life to be blameless. The upshot was that the accused was not, as Servetus had been, promptly arrested, loaded with chains, gaoled, and maltreated, but, as a professor in the university, summoned before the senate to answer the charges.

He declared (as was true) that his accuser Bodenstein was a man of straw, and insisted that Calvin and de Bèze, being the real instigators of the prosecution, ought to appear in person. "Since I am attacked with so much venom, I earnestly beg you to give me an opportunity of defending





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myself. If Calvin and de Bèze are acting in good faith, let them come into court and prove that I have committed the offences with which they charge me. If they believe themselves to have acted rightly, they have no reason to dread the tribunal of Basle, since they made no ado about attacking me before the whole world. . . . I know my accusers to be influential, but God, likewise, is mighty, and He judges without distinction of persons. I am aware that I am an obscure individual, lowly placed and comparatively unknown; but God keeps watch over the lowly, and will demand atonement if their blood should be unjustly shed. I acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court, and declare that if I am guilty of any of the things with which I am charged, my head ought to answer for it.”

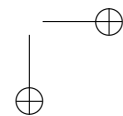
Calvin and de Bèze were unwilling to comply with so frank a demand. Neither of them appeared before the senate of Basle University. It seemed as if the malicious denunciation would go up in a cloud of smoke, when chance rendered Castellio’s enemies unexpected aid. Something came to light which gave disastrous support to the suspicion of heresy and friendliness to heretics attaching to Castellio. A strange thing was disclosed. For twelve years a wealthy foreigner, ostensibly of noble birth, had been living in the canton of Basle, at





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the chateau of Binningen. He was known as Jean de Bruges, and was highly respected and loved in Bourgeois circles. He died in 1556, and the Baslers turned out in force to attend his sumptuous funeral, when the coffin was placed in the vaults of the church of St. Leonard. Years had elapsed when an almost incredible report began to gain ground, it being asserted that the distinguished foreigner had not been a nobleman or merchant, but none other than the infamous and outlawed arch-heretic, David Joris, author of the *Wonder Boek* – a man who had mysteriously disappeared from Flanders in the days of the massacre of the Anabaptists. Greatly were the Baslers discountenanced to learn that they had paid such high honour, both during life and after death, to a man who had been an enemy of the true faith! To atone for the misuse the impostor had made of their hospitality, the long-deceased offender was solemnly tried by the authorities. The body of the heretic was exhumed, the mass of corruption was hanged for a time on the public gallows, and then, in the market-place of Basle, was burned, together with a number of heretical writings. The gruesome spectacle was witnessed by thousands of spectators – among these being, perforce, Castellio, side by side with the other professors of the university. Imagine their feelings. David Joris, during his





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exile in Basle, had been bound to Castellio by the ties of close friendship. They had joined hands in the attempt to rescue Servetus; and it seems probable that Joris was one among the group of anonymous authors of "Martinus Bellius's" *De haereticis*. This much may be regarded as certain, that Castellio had never believed the inmate of the chateau of Binningen to be the simple merchant that refugee had proclaimed himself, but must have known from the first the true identity of the alleged Jean de Bruges. Nevertheless, as tolerant in actual life as in his writings, Castellio would never have played the informer, or have refused to extend the hand of friendship to a man, though the latter had been outlawed by all the Churches and all the civil authorities in the world.

None the less, the disclosure of Castellio's suspect relationships with the most notorious of the Anabaptists gave untimely support to the Calvinist accusation. It was plain that Castellio had, in very truth, been a protector and patron of one arch-heretic. Why not, then, of all? Since misfortunes seldom come singly, at the same moment evidence was adduced to show that Castellio had been in close touch with another much maligned heretic, Bernardino Ochino. At one time a Franciscan monk, and vicar-general of the Capuchins, renowned throughout Italy for his sermons, Ochino

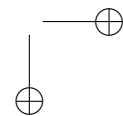




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fell under the ban of the Inquisition and fled to Switzerland. Even there, after becoming a pastor of the Reformed Church, he aroused alarm by the advanced nature of his views. Above all, his last book, *Thirty Dialogues*, contained an interpretation of the Bible which was regarded as blasphemous by the whole Protestant world; for Bernardino Ochino, quoting the Mosaic Law, affirmed that polygamy (though he did not venture to recommend it) was theoretically admissible, and was sanctioned by the Bible.

This book, containing the aforesaid scandalous thesis, and voicing many other opinions regarded by the orthodox as outrageous, was translated by Castellio from Italian into Latin. The heretical treatise was printed in its Latin dress, so that Castellio was unquestionably responsible for the diffusion of most "abominable" views. Proceedings had already been taken against Ochino; and it was natural that, under present conditions, the translator should be regarded as a confederate, and as no less blameworthy than the Italian author. Thus betwixt night and morning Calvin's and de Bèze's vague assertions that Castellio was a focus of the most dangerous heresies, had been given substantial support by the disclosure of his intimacy with David Joris and Bernardino Ochino. It was not to be expected that Basle University





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would continue to extend a protective hand over such a man. Castellio's cause was lost before the trial began.

What a Protestant advocate of toleration might expect from the intolerance of his contemporaries, Castellio could have learned from the fate of his friend Bernardino Ochino – though the latter's cup of sorrows was not filled before Castellio had himself passed away. Ochino, who had for some time been pastor to the Italian refugees in Zurich, was expelled from that city, where the authorities would not even grant him the respite he besought. He was seventy-six, destitute, and had recently been widowed; but these misfortunes secured him no pity. The pious theologians were glad to drive him into renewed exile accompanied by his innocent children. It was mid-winter, and the upland roads were deep in snow. So much the better, thought his adversaries, who would have been glad if the unfortunate old man had died by the wayside. Well, he must seek refuge somewhere, anywhere, in the world. The fanatics who had expelled him were determined to strew difficulties in his path. Lest the compassionate should be over-ready to provide him and his children with warmth and shelter, they sent letters speeding before him, warning good Christians to close their doors against such a wretch, who must be treated as if he were



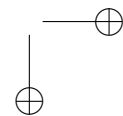


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a leper. The aged scholar left Switzerland as a beggar, struggling through the snow, sleeping in barns; moved northward across Germany by way of Nuremberg, where also the Protestant congregations had been cautioned against him, but where he was allowed to stay for a time; his last hope being to find in Poland kindly persons to give him and his children sustenance and shelter. But even in Poland, intolerance was too much for him. He fled to Moravia, died there in penury towards the end of 1564 or 1565, and was committed, like a vagabond, to a now forgotten grave.

Castellio, who was acquainted with the earlier stages of his friend Ochino's long-drawn-out martyrdom, knew that he himself might expect a similar fate. He was to be tried as a heretic, and the man whose only crime was that of having been too humane, could look for neither humanity nor compassion in an era of such universal inhumanity. Servetus's defender might suffer Servetus's fate. The intolerance of the sixteenth century had laid a strangler's hand on the throat of its most dangerous adversary, the apostle of toleration.

Happily, however, the zealots were denied the supreme triumph of seeing Sebastian Castellio perish in prison, in exile, or at the stake. Death rescued him from his ruthless adversaries. For a long time his physique had been undermined by



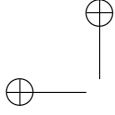


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overwork; and his strength was not able to stand up against so many sorrows and so much excitement. Down to the last, fighting valiantly though vainly, Castellio went on with his occupations at the university and in his study. He was forced to take to his bed at last, having been seized with uncontrollable vomiting, until finally his overtaxed heart resigned its task. On December 29, 1563, Sebastian Castellio died at the age of forty-eight, being thus, “by God’s help, snatched from the claws of his enemies” – as a sympathetic friend phrased it when all was over.

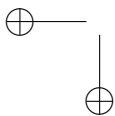
His death put an end to the campaign of calumny. Too late, his fellow citizens recognized how lukewarm they had been in the defence of the most worthy among the inhabitants of Basle. The scantiness of his estate showed how poverty-stricken had been this great scholar. There was not a fragment of silver-ware left in the house. His friends had to provide funeral expenses, pay his trifling debts, and take charge of his children. As if in recompense for the shamefulness of the accusation of heresy, Sebastian Castellio’s interment was a moral triumph. Those who had timidly drawn away from him after the charge of heresy had been brought, were now eager to show how much they loved and honoured him. The funeral train was followed by all the members of the university, the

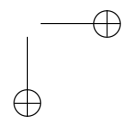
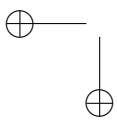
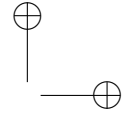
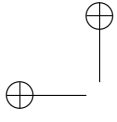




VIOLENCE DISPOSES OF CONSCIENCE

coffin being borne to the cathedral on the shoulders of students, and interred there in the crypt. At their own cost, three hundred of his pupils provided a tombstone on which were chiselled the words: "To our renowned teacher, in gratitude for his extensive knowledge and in commemoration of the purity of his life."







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*Le temps est trouble, le temps se esclarcira
Après la pluie l'on attend le beau temps
Après noises et grans divers contens
Paix adviendra et maleur cessera.
Mais entre deulx quel mal l'on souffrera!
– Chanson de Marguerite d'Autriche.*

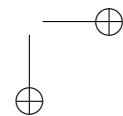
The struggle seemed over. By clearing Castello out of the way Calvin had rid himself of the only adversary endowed with outstanding intelligence. Having, simultaneously, silenced his political opponents in Geneva, the dictator could, unhindered, develop his policy. As soon as dictators have surpassed the inevitable crises of early days, they can usually regard their position as secure for a considerable time. Just as the human organism, after a period of discomfort, becomes acclimatized to new physical surroundings, so, likewise, do the





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nations adapt themselves to new methods of rule. After a while the members of the older generation, who bitterly compare the extant regime of force with their memory of earlier and easier days, die out, while the younger folk, who have no such memories, grow up in the new tradition which they take for granted. In the course of a generation, people can be decisively modified by an idea; and thus it came to pass that, after two decades of Calvin's theocracy, the dictator's new decalogue had progressed from its condition of theological conceptualism and had assumed material form. In justice we have to admit that this talented organizer set to work after his initial victory with wise deliberation, expanding his system gradually until it became world-wide. In respect of behaviour, the iron order he established made Geneva exemplary. From all parts of the western world, members of the Reformed Churches journeyed as pilgrims to the "Protestant Rome" that they might admire so admirable a specimen of a theocratic regime. What rigid discipline and spartan endurance could achieve, was achieved to the full. Granted, dynamic variety was sacrificed to monotony, and joy to a mathematical correctness; but, in return, education was raised to a niche among the arts. Schools, universities, and welfare institutions, were beyond compare; the sciences

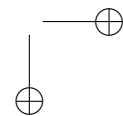




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were sedulously cultivated; and with the foundation of the Academy, Calvin not only brought into being the first intellectual centre of Protestantism, but at the same time set up a counterpart to the Society of Jesus created by his sometime fellow student Loyola – logical discipline being contraposed to logical discipline, and a steeled will to a steeled will. Splendidly equipped with theological armaments, preachers and agitators were sent forth from Geneva to spread Calvinist doctrines. The Master had made up his mind long ago that his authority and his teaching should not be restricted to this one Swiss town. His will-to-power forced him to extend his sway over lands and seas, in the hope that Europe, nay the world, would accept his totalitarian system. Scotland was already under his thumb, thanks to the activities of his legate, John Knox; Holland, Scandinavia, Denmark, and parts of Germany, had been permeated by the Puritan spirit; in France, the Huguenots were rallying to strike a decisive blow: if favoured by fortune, the *Institutio* might become a universal institution, and Calvinism might be established as the unified method of thought and behaviour of western civilization.

How decisively such a victory would have modified European culture, is shown by the imprint of Calvinism on the lands where it speedily be-





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came supreme. Wherever the Genevese Church was able to enforce the moral and religious dictatorship to which it aspired – even though that dictatorship was fleeting – a peculiar character was stamped upon national life. The citizens, or subjects, tended to become persons who “spotlessly” fulfilled their moral and religious obligations; sensuality and libertarianism were tamed and domesticated until they were methodically controlled; life assumed dun, drab hues. So effectively can a strong personality immortalize itself in the daily life of a people, that to this day, in towns where Calvinism was for a time dominant, the casual observer in the streets can recognize its enduring influence, as displayed in a moderation of demeanour, in a lack of emphasis as regards dress and behaviour, and even in the sobriety of architecture. Bridling everywhere the impetuous demands of individualism, strengthening everywhere the grip of the authorities, Calvinism elaborated, wherever it held sway, the type of the good servant, of the man who modestly but persistently subordinates himself to the community – in a word, the type of the excellent official and the ideally perfect member of the middle class. There is considerable truth in the assertion that no other factor has worked so powerfully as Calvinism to promote the unprotesting obedience essential for the success





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of industrialism; for Calvinism inculcated upon the young as a religious duty, the unquestioning acceptance of equalization and mechanization. It must never be forgotten that a State enhances its military strength by the resolute organization of its subjects. Those marvelously tough, tenacious, and frugal navigators and colonists who conquered and settled new continents, first for Holland, and then for England, were mainly of Puritan origin. These Puritan stocks helped to mould the North American character so that the United States and Canada owe a large portion of their immense success to the educational influence of the doctrinaire preacher from Picardy.

Assuredly, we who are living four centuries after the death of Erasmus, after Geneva's determination to live exclusively according to the gospels and God's word, and Calvin's first coming to Geneva – have good reason for congratulating ourselves that the famous "discipline" was not, in its more trenchant form, successfully established throughout Protestant Europe. Hostile to beauty, happiness, life itself, the Calvinists raged against the splendour of vital expansion and against the spendthrift magnificence of the arts. Their exacting and orderly system placed a ban upon creative interpretations and cast a pall over the blaze of colour which, during the Renaissance, had given western





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Europe its empery in the history of civilization. Just as for centuries to come in Geneva they emasculated art; just as, on getting control of England, they hastened to trample underfoot one of the most beautiful blossoms in the world of spirit, the Shakespearean theatre; just as they purged the churches of pictures and statuary, inculcating the fear of the Lord as a substitute for human delight – so, all over Europe, they decreed that enthusiasm was only to be tolerated as a form of piety drawing men nearer to God. Other manifestations of enthusiasm were ruthlessly condemned as opposed to their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. A queer world it would have been had they achieved their end. The European spirit, undergoing atrophy, would have contented itself with theological hair-splitting, instead of unfolding and transforming itself without cessation. For the world remains barren and uncreative if it be not fertilized by liberty and joy; and life is frozen stiff when trammelled by a rigid system.

Happily, Europe did not allow itself to be disciplined, puritanized, “Genevesed,” any more than non-Lacedaemonian Hellas would be dragooned by Spartan severity. Calvinist rigidity was victorious only in a small part of Europe; and even there it speedily abdicated. Calvin’s theocracy could not for long impose itself upon any State; and,





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soon after the dictator's death, stubborn realities mitigated the harshness of his would-be inexorable "discipline." In the end, warm sensuality proved stronger than abstract doctrine. With its vigorous juices, it permeates that which attempts to shackle it, breaking all bonds and tempering every asperity. Just as a muscle cannot remain tensed for an unlimited time or a passion persist enduringly at a white heat, so a dictatorship in the realm of the spirit cannot everlastingly maintain its ruthless radicalism. Indeed, it seldom endures for more than one generation.

Thus Calvin's intolerant discipline was modified sooner than might have been expected. Rarely, after the lapse of a century, does a doctrine resemble closely what it was when first promulgated and we should make a grave mistake were we to suppose the later Calvinism to be identical with the Calvinism of Calvin. No doubt, even in the days of Jean Jacques Rousseau, the Genevese were still anxiously discussing whether the theatre ought or ought not to be forbidden, and were actually asking themselves whether the "fine arts" denoted the progress or the doom of mankind – but long ere this the harsh angles of Calvinism had been rounded off, and rigid interpretations of the word of God had been adapted to human needs. The spirit of development knows how to modify its





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creatures for its own mysterious purposes. Eternal progress accepts from every system no more than is desirable, throwing away restrictive products as we throw away the skin of a fruit. In the great plan which mankind fulfils, dictators are but temporary forces; and what aspires to hedge the rhythm of life within a field of reaction, achieves its aim only for a season, to lead, then, to a yet more energetic escape. Thus by a strange modification, Calvinism, with its fierce determination to hamper individual liberty, gave birth to the idea of political liberty. Holland, Cromwell's England, and the United States of America, the three countries where modern liberalism was first conceived, gave ample scope to the liberal and democratic ideas of the State. One of the most important of latter-day documents, the Declaration of Independence of the United States, issued from the Puritan spirit; while that Declaration, in turn, exercised a decisive influence upon the shaping of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Strangest transformation scene of all when extremes met. The lands which were to be most thoroughly steeped in intolerance became the foci of toleration in Europe. In the very places where Calvin's religion had been law, Castellio's ideal was subsequently realized. That Geneva, where Calvin had burned Servetus because the





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Spaniard dared to differ in opinion from the dictator, became, in due time, the place of refuge for the living Antichrist of his day, Voltaire, "God's enemy." This "Antichrist" was courteously visited by Calvin's successors in office, the preachers at the cathedral of St. Pierre, who did not hesitate to engage in philosophic discussions with the blasphemer. In Holland, again, men who could find rest nowhere else on earth, Descartes and Spinoza, wrote books that were to free mankind from the fetters of ecclesiasticism and tradition. Renan, little disposed to talk of miracles, declared it to be a miracle that rigid Protestants were furthering the rationalist Enlightenment. Yet they did so. Persons who in other lands were being persecuted for their faith and their opinions, fled to the shadow of Calvinism in search of protection. Extremes meet. Within two centuries from the deaths of Castellio and Calvin, the demands of the former and the demands of the latter, brotherly toleration, on the one hand, and religion, on the other, were to dwell peaceably side by side in Holland, in England, and in America.

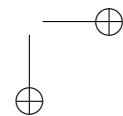
For Castellio's ideals, like Calvin's, outlived their creator. When a man dies, it may seem for a brief space that his message has evaporated into the void; for a few decades silence may enfold it, as the earth his coffin. No one breathed the name





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of Castellio; his friends died or vanished; the few of his writings that had been published gradually became unobtainable, and no one ventured to print the others. It might have been supposed that his fight had been fought, his life lived, in vain. But history moves along strange routes. The apparently unqualified success of his opponent, promoted Castellio's resurrection. The victory of Calvinism in Holland was too complete. The preachers, annealed in the fanatical school of the Academy, thought it incumbent upon them to outdo Calvin's severities in the newly conquered land. Soon, however, among this stubborn people, who had successfully defended themselves against those who chimed empery over the Old World and the New, resistance raised its head. The Netherlanders would not endure to have their newly acquired political liberties stifled by dogmatic coercion in the realm of conscience. Some of the clergy began to remonstrate – being later known as “remonstrants” – against the totalitarian claims of Calvinism; and, when they were in search of spiritual weapons against unsparing orthodoxy, they suddenly remembered a forerunner, who had become almost legendary. Coornhert and the other liberal Protestants disinterred his writings, and from 1603 onwards began to reprint them in the original and in Dutch translations. On all hands





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they secured attention and aroused increasing admiration.

It became apparent that Castellio's ideal of toleration had not perished in the tomb, but had outlived a severe winter. Now it was to blossom with renewed energy. The enthusiasts for toleration were not content with the already published writings of the Master, but sent emissaries to Basle to secure those which had been left behind in manuscript. Having been brought to Holland, these works were published in the original and in translations, so that half a century after Castellio's death a collected edition appeared at Gouda (1612). Thereupon, the resurrected Castellio became a centre of controversy, and had for the first time a large circle of disciples. His influence was widespread, though almost impersonal and anonymous. Castellio's thoughts lived again in others' works and others' struggles. The Arminians' famous advocacy of liberal reforms in Protestantism was mainly supported by arguments derived from his writings. When an Anabaptist was being tried for heresy at Chur, Gantner, a Grisonese preacher, took up the cudgels on behalf of the accused, and appeared in court with "Martinus Bellius's" book in his hand. It is probable, indeed, although documentary evidence of the hypothesis is lacking, that Descartes and Spinoza were directly influenced





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by Castellio's ideas, since Castellio's works were now so widely read in Holland. However this may be, the cause of toleration was not espoused by intellectuals and humanists alone. Gradually it became the cause of the whole population of the Low Countries, who were weary of theological disputations and fratricidal wars of religion. In the Peace of Utrecht, the idea of toleration became a weapon of statecraft, materializing vigorously out of the realm of abstraction to take up its abode on solid earth. The ardent appeal made by Castellio to the princes, demanding that they should show respect for one another's opinions, had now been heard by free people and embodied in its laws. From this first province of what was to be a world dominion, the idea of toleration for every creed and every opinion started its conquest; and one country after another, accepting Castellio's message, condemned persecution of religious or philosophical opinions. In the French Revolution, the rights of the individual were at length guaranteed. It was declared that men had been born free and equal, that they were entitled to express their opinion and to proclaim their faith without restraint. By the time that the next century, the nineteenth, was well under way, the notion of liberty – the liberty of nations, of individuals, of thoughts – had been accepted as an inalienable maxim by the civilized world.





APPENDIX A: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

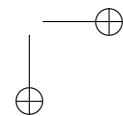
No new editions of Sebastian Castellio's writings have recently been issued, except for a reprint of the French version of *Concerning Heretics* (Martinus Bellis, *De haereticis*, "Magdeburg," 1554). This French version was published at Rouen in the same year as the Latin original; and was reprinted at Geneva in 1913, edited by A. Olivet with a preface by Professor Choisy. See also *Concerning Heretics*, an English version, with excerpts from other works of Sebastian Castellio and David Joris on Religious Liberty, by Roland H. Banton, 1935, being volume XXII of the *Records of Civilization*, published by the Columbia University Press. An edition of the hitherto unpublished *De arte dubitandi* (1562) is being prepared by Dr. Elisabeth Feist from the Rotterdam manuscript for the Academia di Roma. The quotations in the





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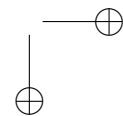
present work are partly taken from the original editions of Castellio's writings, and partly from the only two notable books hitherto devoted to Castellio: (1) *Sébastien Castellion, sa vie et son oeuvre* (1515–1563), by Ferdinand Buisson, 2 vols., Hachette, Paris, 1802 (this work contains a full bibliography to date of publication); (2) *Sébastien Castellion et la Réforme Calviniste*, by Etienne Gran, Paris, 1914. In view of the dispersal of the fragmentary material, I am greatly indebted to the assistance of Mademoiselle Liliane Rosset, of Vézenay, and Monsieur Jean Schorer, Pastor in Geneva. Special acknowledgments are also due to the Basle University Library (which generously allowed me access to the collection of Castellio's manuscripts), to the Zurich Central Library, and to the British Museum Reading Room in London.





APPENDIX B: SOME ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

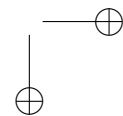
- 1503 John Frith born at Westerham, Kent.
1505 Birth of John Knox.
1509 Calvin born at Noyon in Picardy, July 10.
1509 Etienne Dolet born at Orleans, August 3.
1509 or 1511 Miguel Servetus born at Tudela (Navarre) or at Villanueva (Arragon) – exact place and date uncertain.
1515 Castellio born at Saint-Martin-du-Fresne, Dauphiné.
1517 Luther's ninety-five theses against indulgences published at Wittenberg.
1519 Bèze born at Vézelay, June 24.
1520 Excommunication of Luther.
1521 Diet of Worms.
1528 Capuchin order recognized by Pope.
1529 Louis de Berquin burned in Paris for heresy, April 22.





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- 1531 Servetus's *De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem* published at Hagenau.
- 1531 Zwingli killed at the battle of Kappel, October 11.
- 1532 John Frith arrested for heresy by order of Sir Thomas More.
- 1533 John Frith burned at Smithfield for heresy, July 4.
- 1534 Act of Supremacy, whereby Henry VIII was acknowledged head of English Church.
- 1534 Bernardino Ochino becomes a Capuchin, when forty-seven years old.
- 1535 Sir Thomas More executed on Tower Hill, July 6.
- 1536 Calvin's *Institutio religionis Christiane*, published in Basle, March.
- 1536 Town's Meeting in Geneva avers determination to live thenceforward exclusively according to the gospels and God's word. May 31.
- 1536 Death of Erasmus, at Basle, July 12.
- 1536 Calvin comes to Geneva, July.
- 1536 Calvin appointed "Reader of Holy Writ" in Geneva. September 5.
- 1538 Calvin and Farel, after a referendum, ordered to quit Geneva within three days from April 23. Calvin settles in Strasburg.
- 1539 General Edict against the Lutherans in France, June 24.
- 1540 Three Lutherans burned alive at Lyons, January.
- 1540 Castellio becomes overtly Protestant, and leaves Lyons for Strasburg. Springtime.





SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

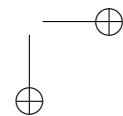
- 1540 French translation of Calvin's *Institutio* first published.
- 1540 Foundation of Society of Jesus approved by Pope, and Loyola becomes first general in 1541.
- 1541 Calvin re-enters Geneva by special invitation, amid popular rejoicings. September 13.
- 1542 Castellio appointed rector of College of Geneva, March 23. Also informally commissioned to preach in Vandœuvres, a suburb of Geneva.
- 1542 Castellio's *Four Books of Sacred Dialogues* in Latin and French published at Geneva, end of year (antedated 1543).
- 1542 Bernardino Ochino, denounced to the Inquisition as a "Lutheran," flees from Italy.
- 1542–1547 Ochino in Basle and Augsburg.
- 1543 Plague in Geneva. Calvin and other preachers refuse to visit pest-hospital.
- 1543 Geneva Council recommends Castellio's appointment as preacher. December 15.
- 1544 Six months' campaign of Calvin against Castellio, who thereupon wishes to resign.
- 1544 Castellio's informal position as preacher at Vandœuvres quashed, and his appointment as rector of the college in Geneva cancelled. July. Castellio leaves Geneva for Berne, and thence removes to Basle. July and August.
- 1546 Death of Luther, February 18.





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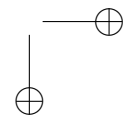
- 1546 Servetus opens a correspondence with Calvin. January or February. Calvin touched on the raw by Servetus's outspoken criticism of *Institutio*; and outraged by the tenor of a MS. copy of Servetus's still unpublished *Restitutio*, Calvin writes to Farel: "Did Servetus come to Geneva, I would never suffer him to go away alive." Ides of February.
- 1546 Etienne Dolet burned in Paris as relapsed atheist. August 3.
- 1547 Death of Henry VIII of England, accession of Edward VI, January 28.
- 1547–1553 Ochino in England.
- 1548 Giordano Bruno born at Nola.
- 1549 Bucer, at Cranmer's instigation, becomes professor of theology at Cambridge.
- 1551 Bucer dies at Cambridge, February 28.
- 1553 Death of Edward VI of England, accession of Mary, July 6.
- 1553 Clandestine publication of Servetus's *Christianismi Restitutio*.
- 1553 Calvin prompts Guillaume Trie's letter denouncing Miguel Servetus to the ecclesiastical authorities at Lyons. February 26.
- 1553 Servetus escapes from episcopal prison at Lyons (probably with connivance of authorities), April 7.
- 1553 Servetus burned in effigy at Lyons, together with his books, *Christianismi Restitutio*, etc. June 17.
- 1553 Servetus arrested in Geneva. Sunday, August 13.





SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY

- 1553 Servetus burned alive at Champel, near Geneva, October 27.
- 1554 Knox visits Calvin at Geneva and Bullinger at Zurich.
- 1554–1563 Ochino in Basle and Zurich.
- 1554 Calvin publishes his first apologia for his conduct in the Servetus affair: *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de Sacra Trinitate, etc.*, and, in French, *Declaration, etc., contre les erreurs détestables de Michel Servetus*, both at end of February at Geneva.
- 1554 Castellio's *De haereticis* published in March.
- 1554 Calvin writes to Bullinger about *De haereticis*, March 28.
- 1554 Publication of de Bèze's *De haereticis a civili magistrata puniendis libellus, adversus Martini Belli farraginem, etc.*, September.
- 1554 Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini*, written for publication this year, but first published at Amsterdam in 1612.
- 1556 Cranmer burned at Oxford, March 21.
- 1556 Knox again in Geneva.
- 1556 Death of Loyola at Rome, July 31.
- 1558 Death of Mary Tudor, November 17, accession of Elizabeth Tudor.
- 1560 Melancthon died, April 19.
- 1560 Knox's Confession of Faith adopted, and Roman Catholicism formally abolished by Scottish Parliament.
- 1562 Castellio's *De arte dubitandi* written, but not published.





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- 1562 Castellio's *Conseil a la France desolee*. October
- 1563 de Bèze's *Responsio ad defensiones et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis* published in Geneva.
- 1563 Publication of Ochino's *Thirty Dialogues*.
- 1563 Formal complaint against Castellio, as blasphemer, etc., lodged with Basle authorities, November.
- 1563 Castellio died at Basle, December 29.
- 1564 Calvin died in Geneva, May 27.
- 1564 or 1565 Bernardino Ochino died in Moravia.
- 1564 Bèze succeeded Calvin as pastor at Geneva.
- 1572 Massacre of St. Bartholomew, August 24.
- 1572 Death of John Knox, November 24.
- 1592 Giordano Bruno arrested at Naples by order of the Inquisition. May 22.
- 1600 Bruno burned in the Campo dei Fiori, Rome. February 17.

