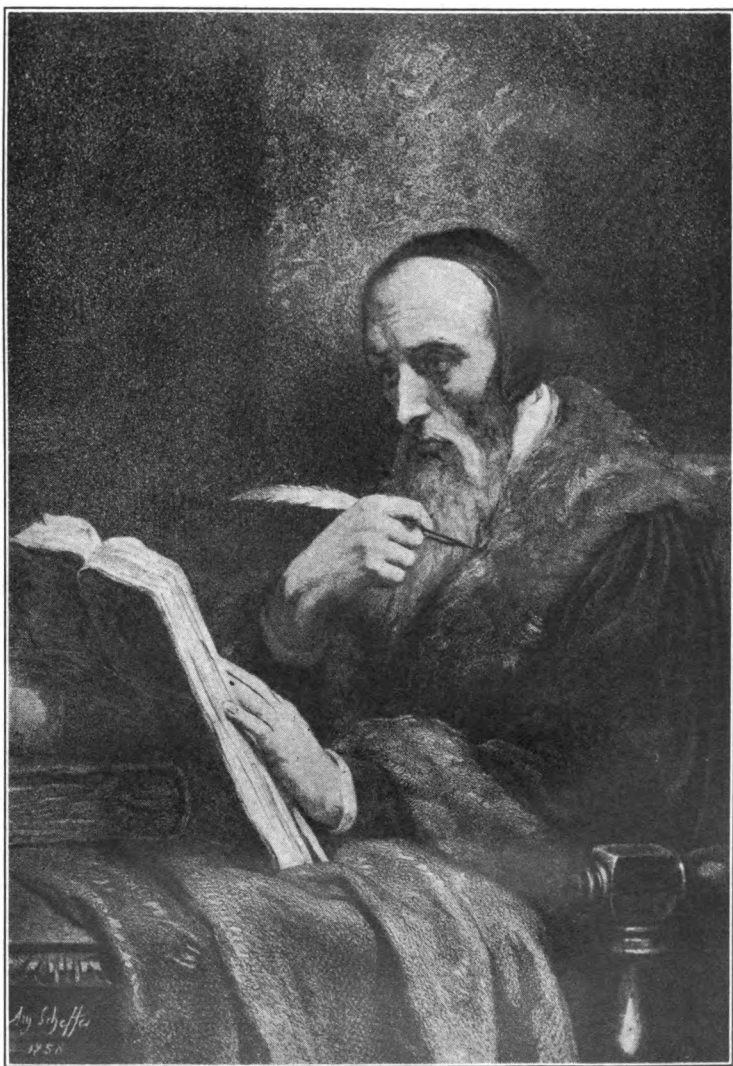




Calvin in His Study

JOHN CALVIN

Theologian, Preacher, Educator, Statesman

*Presented to the Reformed Churches holding the
Presbyterian System, on the 400th
Anniversary of the Reformer's Birth*

BY

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CHAPTER XXX.

CALVINISM IN AMERICA.

By Rev. Wm. Henry Roberts, D.D., LL.D.

Philadelphia, Pa.

Politically, Calvinism is the chief source of modern republican government. That Calvinism and republicanism are related to each other as cause and effect is acknowledged by authorities who are not Presbyterians or Reformed. Isaac Taylor calls republicanism the Presbyterian principle. Bishop Horsley declares that "Calvin was unquestionably in theory a Republican," and adds that "so wedded was he to this notion, that he endeavored to fashion the government of all the Protestant Churches upon republican principles." This thought is still further carried forward by Bancroft when he speaks of "the political character of Calvinism, which with one consent and with instinctive judgment, the monarchs of that day feared as republicanism." Emilio Castelar, the leader of the Spanish liberals, says that "Anglo-Saxon democracy is the product of a severe theology, learned in the cities of Holland and Switzerland." Leopold Von Ranke, the German historian, gives his weighty judgment in the words, "John Calvin was the virtual founder of America." James Anthony Froude, the English historian, bears witness to the character of the political progress of the last three centuries in the sentence, "nearly all the chief benefactors of the modern world have been Calvinists." Lord Macaulay writes that the ministers of the Church of Scotland inherited the republican opinions of Knox, and also states that the

Long Parliament, which was controlled by Presbyterians, "is justly entitled to the reverence and gratitude of all in every part of the world who enjoy the blessings of constitutional freedom." The Long Parliament was the body which gave existence to the Westminster Assembly, and Macaulay's testimony therefore points to the intimate connection between Calvinistic doctrine and constitutional government. These extracts from the writings of men who were not themselves Presbyterians, indicate clearly the political influence of the doctrinal ideas contained in the Westminster Standards.

The Westminster Standards were the common doctrinal standards of all the Calvinists of Great Britain and Ireland, the countries which have given to the United States its language and to a considerable degree its laws. The English Calvinists, commonly known as Puritans, early found a home on American shores, and the Scotch, Dutch, Scotch-Irish, French and German settlers, who were of the Protestant faith, were their natural allies. It is important to a clear understanding of the influence of Westminster in American Colonial history to know that the majority of the early settlers of this country from Massachusetts to New Jersey inclusive, and also in parts of Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas, were Calvinists. They brought with them to this land those doctrinal ideas which exalt, as we have seen, in the human mind, the sovereignty of God, which bring all lives and institutions to the test of the Holy Scripture, which teach that the divine being is no respecter of persons, and which lead logically to the conclusion that all men are born free and equal. Further, the early British settlers, whether Presbyterians or Puritans, were all believers in the Westminster Confession. The Congregationalists of New England adopted it for

doctrine in 1648, one year after its completion at London; the Baptists also adopted it in 1677, except as to Baptist peculiarities; the Presbyterians always maintained it vigorously for both doctrine and government; and the Reformed Dutch were in full sympathy with the Presbyterians. To put the situation concisely, about the year 1700 the American Colonists were divided into two great sections, the one Episcopalians and Monarchists, the other Calvinists and believers in popular government. From Boston to the Potomac Puritan and Presbyterian Calvinists were in the ascendant, and from the Potomac southward the majority of the people were of opposite tendencies. Naturally between these parties conflicts arose, caused by their fundamental differences in religion, in church government, and in the views which they held of the rights of the people. Into a lengthy and adequate consideration of these differences and of the conflicts which they engendered, the limits of space forbid that I should enter. I shall content myself with concise statement of several particulars, each of which is intimately connected as a fundamental factor with the formation of the American Republic.

One of the initial points of difference between the Calvinists and other of the early American settlers had to do with popular education. We to-day believe that the education of all citizens is fundamental to the welfare of the Republic. This principle, however, it should be understood, is a logical result of Calvinistic thought and practice. Calvinists, taught by the Holy Scriptures made religion a personal matter, not between man and the Church, but between the soul and God, and necessitated personal knowledge on the part of human beings of God's Word as the law of faith and life. Education in religious truth became therefore a cardinal principle

of the Calvinists, and the steps were easy and swift from it to secular and popular education. This logical connection between Calvinism and education is acknowledged by our historian Bancroft, who says that Calvin was the "first founder of the public school system." It is also shown by the history of popular education. A high authority states that Presbyterian Scotland "is entitled to the credit of having first established schools for primary instruction to be supported at the public expense." The Scotch system of free education was founded in 1567, fifty years before the American Calvinist colonies had been established. Reformed Holland followed closely in the footsteps of Scotland, and the first settlers in New England and the Middle States, being themselves Calvinists, naturally proceeded at once, like their European brethren of similar faith, to care for the interests of education. Harvard, Yale and Princeton Universities were all founded by men who believed in the Westminster Confession, and as early as 1647 Massachusetts and Connecticut established public school systems. In some other colonies, however, a very different state of affairs was to be found. An Episcopal governor of Virginia, in 1661, thanked God that there were in that region neither "free schools nor printing." Steadily year by year, however, the belief in popular education, nurtured by our Calvinistic and Puritan ancestors, by men who believed in the Westminster Confession, and in the canons of the Synod of Dort, spread throughout the colonies, and to-day the right of all persons to become through instruction intelligent citizens is everywhere recognized in this great republic. Is education one of the foundation-stones of the nation? Then honor to whom honor is due, to the men of the Westminster Confession, and to those who with them be-

lieved in the application of Calvinistic principles to secular education.

Another cardinal principle of the government of this American nation is the separation of Church and State, with its resulting absolute religious freedom for the individual. This characteristic of the organization of the republic is also a logical outcome of Calvinistic doctrine. Establishments of religion are found in Europe, even in such Presbyterian lands as Scotland and Holland, but they are survivals from a past age, and are not a rightful development from the great Calvinistic principle, "that God alone is Lord of the conscience." This was seen clearly in the American Colonies first by the Dutch settlers in New York, who were Presbyterians, then by the Baptists, who equally with the Presbyterians are Calvinists. The English-speaking American Presbyterians quickly recognized the full force of the principle, and as early as 1729, the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church declared that the power to persecute persons for their religion was contrary to the Word of God, and that the Church should be independent of the State. This Scriptural position was antagonized, however, at the first by the Congregationalists in New England, and especially by the Episcopalians in all the colonies where they were in authority. Gradually, however, the principle of untrammelled religious liberty won its way to recognition in New England, and the acknowledgment of it, there and in other parts of the country, was hastened by the attempts made from 1750 onward to establish the Episcopal Church in the colonies. United resistance to such attempts was first organized in 1766, ten years prior to the Declaration of Independence, and in large part by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church. A petition had been sent by Episcopalians, in

the year just named, from a convention held in New York, to the British government, for the appointment of Bishops for America. Presbyterians and Congregationalists, Dutch, German and French Protestants had experienced the baneful power of established Episcopal Churches on the other side of the Atlantic. The bishops whom their ancestors had suffered under were arrogant lords, temporal and spiritual, over the heritage of God, men of an arbitrary temper and a merciless, persecuting spirit. American Calvinists could not forget the awful butcheries of the Spanish tyrants in the Netherlands, the terrible devastation wrought in the valley of the Rhine, the 100,000 victims of the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the 18,000 covenanters who in Scotland, during a few brief years, were either massacred by dragoons or executed by the agents of ecclesiastical tyranny. The moment, therefore, that religious liberty was seriously threatened by the schemes of a Church which at that time was ultra-loyal to the British crown, and whose ministers with hardly an exception were opposed to the cause of the Colonies, American Calvinists joined forces and from New England, southward through New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the valley of Virginia, to the highlands of North and South Carolina, never wavered a hair's-breadth from a thoroughgoing devotion to the cause of religious liberty. They stood shoulder to shoulder in opposition to ecclesiastical tyranny, and their courage and high intelligence secured for the republic, that religious freedom which is now a leading characteristic of our national life.

Having dealt with religious liberty, it is natural now to turn to the consideration of the specific relation of the American Presbyterian Church, to the civil liberty which was secured by the independence of the United

States. The opening of the Revolutionary struggle found the Presbyterian ministers and churches ranged solidly on the side of the colonies. In 1775 the General Synod issued a pastoral letter, an extract from which indicates the spirit prevailing in the Church, and reads, "Be careful to maintain the union which at present subsists through all the Colonies. In particular, as the Continental Congress, now sitting at Philadelphia, consists of delegates chosen in the most free and unbiased manner by the people, let them not only be treated with respect and encouraged in their difficult service, not only let your prayers be offered up to God for His direction in their proceedings, but adhere firmly to their resolutions, and let it be seen that they are able to bring out the whole strength of this vast country to carry them into execution." Contemporary with this letter of the Synod was the famous Mecklenburgh Declaration of Independence, renouncing all allegiance to Great Britain, passed by a convention in Western North Carolina, composed of delegates nearly all Presbyterians, and forestalling the action of the Colonial Congress in the same line by more than a year. Further, in the sessions of the Continental Congress, the influence of no delegate exceeded that wielded by the Rev. John Witherspoon, president of Princeton College, the only clerical signer of the Declaration of Independence—"a man Scotch in accent and strength of conviction, but American at heart." Under his leadership and that of others the American Presbyterian Church never faltered in her devotion to the cause of the independence of these United States; her ministers and members periled all for its support, being ready, with Witherspoon to go to the block, if need be, in defence of civil and religious liberty. So resolute and aggressive were they in

their opposition to the English government that the Colonial cause was repeatedly spoken of in Great Britain as the Presbyterian Rebellion. At the close of the war, in 1783, the General Synod addressed a letter to its churches, congratulating them on the "general and almost universal attachment of the Presbyterian body to the cause of liberty and the rights of mankind." What was true of the Presbyterian was true of the other Calvinistic churches of the land, of the Congregational and also of the German and Dutch Reformed. It is estimated that of the 3,000,000 Americans at the time of the American Revolution, 900,000 were of Scotch or Scotch-Irish origin; that the German and Dutch Calvinists numbered 400,000, and the Puritan English 600,000. If the believers in the Westminster Standards and cognate creeds had been on the side of George III in 1776, the result would have been other than it was. But they stood where thoroughgoing Calvinists must ever stand, with the people and against tyrants, and therefore under the blessing of God the American Colonies became free and independent States. Rightly then do we acknowledge the debt of the Republic to the men of the Westminster Standards for civil liberty.

We pass now to a fact which in connection with the influence of our Church upon the republic is quite as important as any yet dealt with, the position of the Presbyterian Church for three-quarters of a century, as the sole representative upon this continent of republican government as now organized in this nation. From 1706 to the opening of the revolutionary struggle, the only body in existence which stood for our present national political organization was the General Synod of the American Presbyterian Church. It alone among ecclesiastical and political colonial organizations exercised

authority, derived from the colonists themselves, over bodies of Americans scattered through all the colonies from New England to Georgia. The colonies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is to be remembered, while all dependent upon Great Britain were independent of each other. Such a body as the Continental Congress did not exist until 1774. The religious condition of the country was similar to the political. The Congregational Churches of New England had no connection with each other, and had no power apart from the civil government. The Episcopal Church was without organization in the Colonies, was dependent for support and a ministry on the Established Church of England, and was filled with an intense loyalty to the British monarchy. The Reformed Dutch Church did not become an efficient and independent organization until 1771, and the German Reformed Church did not attain to that condition until 1793. The Baptist Churches were separate organizations, the Methodists were practically unknown, and the Quakers were non-combatants. But in the midst of these disunited ecclesiastical units one body of American Christians stood out in marked contrast. The General Synod of the Presbyterian Church was not dependent for its existence upon any European Church, was efficiently organized, and had jurisdiction over churches in the majority of the colonies. Every year the Presbyterian ministers and elders from the different colonies, came up to the cities of Philadelphia or New York, to consider not only the religious interests of their people, but likewise educational and at times political questions. It was impossible, at that date, it must be remembered, to separate these latter issues from the affairs of the Church, for the country was under the English government, the

Episcopal Church was the only Church to which that government was favorable, and Christians of other beliefs were compelled to act vigorously and unitedly in the maintenance of both their religious and secular interests. And the Presbyterian Church filled with the spirit of liberty, intensely loyal to its convictions of truth, and gathering every year in its General Synod, became through that body a bond of union and correspondence between large elements in the population of the divided colonies. Is it any wonder that under its fostering influence the sentiments of true liberty, as well as the tenets of a sound gospel, were preached throughout the territory from Long Island to South Carolina, and that above all a feeling of unity between the Colonies began slowly but surely to assert itself. Too much emphasis cannot be laid, in connection with the origin of the Nation, upon the influence of that ecclesiastical republic, which from 1706 to 1774 was the only representative on this continent of fully developed federal republican institutions. The United States of America owes much to that oldest of American Republics, the Presbyterian Church.

The influence which the Presbyterian Church exercised for the security of unity between the Colonies was zealously employed, at the close of the war for independence, to bring them into a closer union. The main hindrance to the formation of the Federal Union, as it now exists, lay in the reluctance of many of the States to yield to a general government any of the powers which they possessed. The federal party in its advocacy of closer union had no more earnest and eloquent supporters than John Witherspoon, Elias Boudinot and other Presbyterian members of the Continental Congress. Sanderson, in his lives of the signers of the Declaration

of Independence, states that "Witherspoon strongly combated the opinion expressed in Congress that a lasting confederation among the States was impracticable, and he warmly maintained the absolute necessity of union to impart vigor and success to the measures of government." In this he was aided by many who had come to the views which he, as a Presbyterian, had always maintained. Those who differed with Witherspoon at the first came at last to his position. Slowly but surely ideas of government, in harmony with those of the Westminster Standards, were accepted as formative principles for the government of the United States, and that by many persons not connected with the Presbyterian Church. Among these were the great leaders in the Constitutional Convention, James Madison, a graduate of Princeton, who sat as a student under Witherspoon; Alexander Hamilton, of Scotch parentage, and whose familiarity with Presbyterian government is fully attested; and above all George Washington, who though an Episcopalian, had so great a regard for the Presbyterian Church and its services to the country, that he not only partook of holy communion with its members, but gave public expression to his high esteem. Indeed, at one time so marked was the respect for our Church during Revolutionary days, that it was feared by Christians of other denominations that it might become in America what it was in Scotland, the Established Church, and so widespread was the feeling of alarm, that the General Synod felt compelled to pass a deliverance setting forth its views in relation to religious freedom. Great, however, as was the influence of the Presbyterian Church in those trying times, its ministers and members were always true to their own principles, and in every possible manner sought to maintain and further them in their

application to the government of the United States, and especially in connection with the union of the Colonies whose independence had been achieved. Presbyterians both in the Old World and the New had been accustomed to representative government, to the subordination of the parts to the whole, and to the rule of majorities for more than two centuries prior to the American Revolution. They knew the value of unity to popular government, and they labored earnestly and persistently until their governmental principles were all accepted by the American people, and the divided Colonies became the United States of America. It is not that the claim is made, that either the principles of the Calvinistic creed or of the Presbyterian government, were the sole source from which sprang the government of this great Republic of which we to-day are citizens, but it is asserted that mightiest among the forces which made the Colonies a nation were the governmental principles found in the Westminster Standards, and that the Presbyterian Church taught, practiced, and maintained in fulness, first in this land that form of government in accordance with which the Republic has been organized. Our own historian Bancroft says, "the Revolution of 1776, so far as it was affected by religion, was a Presbyterian measure. It was the natural outgrowth of the principles which the Presbyterianism of the Old World planted in her sons, the English Puritans, the Scotch Covenanters, the French Huguenots, the Dutch Calvinists, and the Presbyterians of Ulster." What the historian states as true of the war for independence is true of the organized government of the Republic. The elements of popular government were, without question, found in many of the Colonies, especially in New England, but the federal principle, whose acknowledgment resulted in the Ameri-

can nation, through the adoption of the Constitution of 1788, was found previous to that year in full operation upon this Continent, only in the American Presbyterian Church, and had in it its most practical and successful advocate. Chief among the blessings which Presbyterians and Reformed aided in bestowing upon this country was and is the Federal Union.

Such is the relation of Calvinism to our national life, such is the answer which as Presbyterians and Reformed we give to the question, what have these principles done for the Republic? To-day, as we look over our broad national domains, as we see the 80,000,000 of our inhabitants in the enjoyment of education, of religious freedom, of civil liberty, of the blessings which the Federal Union has secured to the nation, we can say, this hath Calvinism wrought! This, too, is our answer to the assertion made by some ill-informed persons, in whose minds prejudice has usurped the throne of sound reason, the assertion that Calvinism is dead! Dead! Calvinism dead! Its fundamental principles are maintained to-day in this land not only by the Presbyterian and the Reformed Churches, but also by Baptists, Congregationalists, and many Episcopalians. The majority of American Protestants are Calvinists. Calvinism dead! It will cease to be both life and power only when popular education shall give place to popular ignorance, when civil and religious liberty shall vanish, when the Republic shall be shattered into separate and warring nationalities, and when the very life shall have perished from government of the people, by the people, and for the people. But never shall such changes be. Oh, America, America! The sovereign hand of the Almighty rocked thy cradle, the eternal purpose sustained and nurtured thy founders, and we believe that the unchangeable di-



vine decree hath ordained thee to be an indestructible union of indestructible States, the leader of the hopes of mankind, the majority of thy citizen servants of God and lovers of humanity, until the hour when God shall in truth dwell with men, and all mankind shall be His people.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RECENT STATISTICS

of the Reformed Churches throughout the world holding
the Presbyterian System.

IN THE UNITED STATES.

	Communicants
The Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., ..	1,300,329
The Presbyterian Church in the U. S.,	268,733
The United Presb. Church of N. A.,	153,956
The Reformed (Dutch) Church in America,	117,139
Christian Reformed Church in N. A.,	25,175
The Reformed (German) Church in the United States,	289,328
Reformed Presbyterian Church, Synod, ...	9,404
The Associate Reformed Synod of the South,	13,368
Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod,	3,500
The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist or Presby- terian Church in the U. S. A.,	14,500
Other churches,	1,000
Total,	2,196,432

IN CANADA.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada,	241,511
Church of Scotland in Canada,	10,000

IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

The Presbyterian Church of England,	85,774
The Church of Scotland in England,	4,000
Calvinistic Methodist or Presbyterian Church of Wales,	185,000

IN IRELAND.

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The Presbyterian Church in Ireland,	106,516
The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ire- land,	4,000
Other churches,	2,000

IN SCOTLAND.

The Church of Scotland,	698,566
The United Free Church of Scotland,	505,774
The Free Church of Scotland,	10,000
Other churches,	10,000

EUROPE.

Bohemia and Moravia,	250,000
France,	1,000,000
Germany,	3,000,000
Holland,	2,500,000
Hungary,	3,000,000
Italy,	100,000
Switzerland,	1,700,000
Other countries,	400,000

MISCELLANEOUS.

Africa,	400,000
Asia,	400,000
Australasia,	700,000
South America,	80,000

The above tables show the number of communicants in America and Great Britain, and the number of adherents in other countries:—

SABBATH-SCHOOL STATISTICS OF REFORMED AND PRESBY-
TERIAN CHURCHES IN THE UNITED
STATES, 1908.

Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.,	1,164,790
Presbyterian Church in the U. S.,	224,336

Welsh Calvinistic Methodist or Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.,	15,500
United Presbyterian Church of North America,	152,294
Associate Reformed Synod of the South, ...	10,060
Reformed Presbyterian Church, Synod,	9,127
Reformed Presbyterian Church, Gen. Synod,	3,500
Reformed (Dutch) Church in America,	117,633
Christian Reformed Church in N. A.,	23,500
Reformed (German) Church in the United States,	268,079
Total,	*1,977,632

*About one-tenth of the above total is composed of officers and teachers.