



John Calvin. Calvin before the Bishop. See page 15.

JOHN CALVIN

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Florence H. Crowell.

JOHN CALVIN.

THE name of JOHN belonged to many good men. From John the Baptist—who taught in the wilderness of Judea, as you read in Matthew and Luke—and John, the beloved friend and disciple of Jesus, who wrote the gospel, three epistles, and the last

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book in the Bible also—onward to these Johns, of whom I am writing, and many more Johns, I hope, who are now boys or wee babies, but will grow up to be holy and zealous men, the name of John has been great in the Church.

Of John Knox and John Huss you have read. I shall now tell you of JOHN CALVIN, called, next to Luther, the great Reformer.

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And I will begin by telling the end of my story. John Calvin was one of the Reformers whose life was not taken away by his enemies, but who lived to old age and died quietly in his bed. He was born in Picardy, a district of France, in the year 1509, and died in Geneva in 1564.

John Calvin's father was a Frenchman, an officer in the town where he lived, and also

an officer of the Roman Catholic Church. He was very zealous for his Church, and trusted to it rather than to Jesus for the salvation of his soul.

He was an educated man, rich and proud, boasting much of his honesty. He was very fond of his children, and made great plans about what they should do, and how great they should be, when they were grown. There were three chil-

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dren—John, his brother and his sister.

The father would say that the girl should marry a rich nobleman, John should enter the Church and his brother the army.

“John, you shall be a priest. If you are zealous and learned you will become a bishop, then an archbishop, then my lord cardinal. And who knows, son John, but you may be

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made pope? All things are possible to the wise.”

John thought learning a royal road to greatness, for he dearly loved study, and his teacher said he was his brightest pupil.

As I have told you something of John's father, I will say a few words of his mother. She was a lovely, gentle, pious woman, and a very tender mother to her children. She

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talked with them much of God, and went with them to pray.

In all John's life the memory of his mother was dear and beautiful. It blessed his early years and comforted his manhood, and he looked forward to joining her before God's throne in heaven.

John had a cousin whom he loved, named Robert. John's father said to him,

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“Your cousin Robert is a fool. He is throwing away his chance of greatness and wealth for some nonsense he calls ‘duty.’ Son John, the Church is duty. Stick to the Church, and never mind ‘duty.’”

“Robert reads the Bible,” said John, “and is not that a good thing to do?”

“The Bible is a maker of mischief,” said his father. “The Church says let it alone.

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I never want you to have anything to do with it.”

John Calvin's father believed that the soul of his son was safe. So long as he was sure of that, he gave all his time and labor to promoting John's interest in this world. He would talk to the boy by the hour of the great honor and power and riches he would have when he was a man.

As John grew older more

money was needed for his education, and his father hit upon a very odd way of getting it—at least, it seems odd to us, though he thought it all right.

John was twelve years old, and his father said he should be made a priest and given a place in a village some fifty miles from his home. In those days this was often done. A boy was made a priest, and received the pay or

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salary of some parish without doing any work in it, maybe without ever going near it.

John Calvin was brought before the bishop and made a priest. His hair was tonsured, or cut round in a circle, and he was given a long black gown. It was thought very important that John's hair and dress should be all right, but it was no matter whether there was anybody to marry,

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bury or baptize the poor people of the parish, which he never visited.

John did not know that there was any harm in this state of affairs. Like most children, he believed that whatever his father thought and did was right.

He got the money from the parish, and this kept him at school. His teacher loved him, and said he had good

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principles. Now it is curious to notice that whenever he told his companions about what was right and wrong he fell back on his mother's teachings.

“You must not waste your time,” he would say; “it is wrong—my mother says so.”

“Do not think you can escape from God's sight; God's eye is ever on us—my mother says so.”

His mother's teachings had a firm place in his heart.

When he was still quite young his father sent him to study in a very famous school in Paris. Of this school we are told that most of the students were poor. The teachers were also poor, getting very little pay for teaching, but feeling it a great honor to be at so noted a school. The priests had full control, and if any one dis-

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pleased them, read the Bible or thought even what the priests did not like, they were at liberty to imprison or even to burn him. You may think John Calvin would be afraid to say a word these powerful and cruel men would not like.

In spite of such hard rule and such oppression, there were to be found at the Paris school young men who dared to study the word of God, and

do as it taught them. Among these was John Calvin's cousin Robert.

God said of Saul of Tarsus, as you have read in the Bible, that he was a chosen vessel to bear his name. So was John Calvin a chosen vessel to hold and make known the truth of God—to explain and enforce the holy truth which Rome had been doing her best during many years to destroy.

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Between them we find much resemblance. Saul was brought up among the strictest sect of the Pharisees, and John among the strictest sect of the Romanists. Both were famous scholars, and expected to fill a high place in the world; and both were taken by God to do a great work in his kingdom. Both went to the capital city of their country to be educated; both were brave and

fearless. God taught them, and called them to do his will.

Among the first teachers of the truth whom God sent to John Calvin was his cousin Robert. This good young man would bring his Bible and read it, and when John would say, "Take away your book — my father says it is bad," Robert would weep and pray aloud. John was so moved by his

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cousin's earnestness and sincerity that he thought he would read the Bible himself.

Among the professors in Paris was one who taught Greek, a famous scholar and secretly a lover of the Bible. He asked John Calvin to study Greek, and told him he could then read the New Testament in the very language in which it was written.

Years after, when Calvin

had become a famous teacher and preacher, this professor of Greek went to Geneva to learn from him the way of God more perfectly, and thus the teacher became the pupil.

It is pleasant to us to know that when Calvin was a boy and a young man he led a quiet, honest and orderly life. Among all the temptations to wickedness in the city of Paris, far from his home and friends,

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and left to do as he pleased, John neither rioted, drank, fought nor swore like many of his fellow-students, but even his worst enemies are forced to hold him blameless.

Boys and girls little think how great need there is of doing exactly right when they are young.

How does the reader know but some day all the world will be searching his history

as it now searches the history of Calvin, to find a flaw?

How beautiful to hold fast one's integrity!—to live before God and men an honest life, as did our example, the holy child Jesus, and as did those other faithful children, Samuel, Jeremiah, Timothy and John the Baptist.

Besides his Cousin Robert and the professor of Greek, Calvin found a teacher in a

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poor and pious old man who lived alone in the woods. This old man had been forced to fly from the priests, but in the hut in the woods, or in the old ruins where he hid himself, he was not idle, for he studied the Bible and taught all who came to him.

This old man met John and the Greek teacher one day, and so pleased them by his good talk that they went often

to visit him, and each time they came back richer than they went, not in money, but in wisdom—the wisdom of God.

From Paris, Calvin sometimes went home to “Noyon,” his native place, to visit his parents, and as the cost of living and of books was ever getting greater his father secured for him another church with a larger salary. This was when

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he was eighteen, and still he did not feel that he had any duty to perform to his people, and thought all his business was to take their money.

When he was a boy his playmates had a queer name for him ; they called him the “ Accusative,” from a case in Latin. They called him this because he continually accused them of their sins, and would not do wrong with them.

Calvin remained in the “accusative case” all his life. He spent his best years in accusing a wicked Church and a wicked world of their crimes against God.

At the age of twenty, Calvin began to feel that he had a work to do, and that if he were a priest he had a duty to perform—he should preach. He exchanged his new parish for another called in French, Pont



Calvin at Geneva.

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l'Eveque, or the Bishop's Bridge.

In this town his grandfather—by trade a cooper, a maker of wine casks—had lived and his own father had been born. The people came out in crowds to hear the sermons of the old cooper's grandson, John Calvin.

Calvin had short sermons, right to the point, and “did not count that fit to be called

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a sermon whose aim was not to make men better.”

His father did not like him to preach.

“Never mind the people—study and become great,” he said to John.

“The people have souls to be saved,” replied Calvin.

One day his father said to him, “I have changed my mind—you shall not be a priest, but a lawyer.”

“Why is that?” asked his son.

“You will make more money by law, and I am afraid you will get into trouble preaching.”

“It is my duty to obey my father. I will study law, but I can still preach,” said Calvin.

Calvin seemed to take no rest. By day he studied law at Orleans and by night he studied the Bible, and in the

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evenings he went to secret meetings for preaching and prayer.

“God led me,” he says, “from darkness to light by his own right hand.”

It was his custom after a plain tea to study until midnight, and then after a few hours' sleep to rise early in the morning and study hard all day.

I would not advise any

young person to follow this example, for by such hard study Calvin hurt his health, and all his life he was hindered in his work by ill-health.

However, young people are generally too idle, and not too industrious.

About this time Calvin's good and beautiful mother, Jeanne Laufranc, died. She was of noble family, but of nobler soul.

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Shortly after this his father was struck by paralysis, and Calvin left his studies and went home to take care of him. This care of a sick parent lasted some time. When his father was dead and Calvin went back to Paris to study, he was a strong-hearted, honest Protestant.

At Paris he had a friend called Cop, who was a preacher at the Sorbonne. Cop be-

lieved as Calvin did, and Calvin wrote a sermon which Cop preached. The sermon was on "Faith," and said that men are not saved by good works, but by faith in Jesus. This is true Bible doctrine, but it made the priests so angry that they wanted to kill Cop and Calvin, and the two were forced to fly from Paris. Some writers tell us that, like Saul, the two friends were let down

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over the wall of Paris in a basket.

Calvin went to Nerac, where the pious queen Margaret was his true friend.

While he was here, a good and venerable man foretold that he would “restore the Church of Christ in France.”

He went back to Paris and preached at much risk. He then went to Noyon and visited the graves of his father

and mother, and received what property belonged to him. He next went to the city of Ferrara, in Italy, where Renee—another pious queen—was his friend, and where he preached in her court.

At twenty-five years of age, Calvin was known as one of the wisest men of his time and one of the most earnest Reformers.

At this age he wrote his

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book called “The Institutes,” one of the most famous ever written.

The epistles of Paul in the New Testament and the Psalms of David in the Old were his favorite studies, and you know the Bible makes men wise. It is a fountain of learning.

Calvin had more of the stern, firm, decided nature of his father than of the gentle

beauty of his mother's character. He is called by his enemies a cruel man, a hard man, but he was neither hard nor cruel. He was an earnest man. He lived in trying times, and had no hours for rest or softness. His life was a sharp struggle with the errors of his Church, but he had a warm and loving heart.

He married a lady named Idelette, and he loved her very

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much. He says she was a “grave, honest and well-beloved woman.” They lived together nine years ; then she died, and he mourned her very much. He lived for a number of years longer, but he said he was always lonely without her.

Calvin and Idelette had one little son. This dear child died quite young. Of him Calvin writes to a dear friend,

“God gave to us a precious son. He took him away.”

Calvin was called to be pastor and teacher at the city of Geneva, in Switzerland. Like Paul, he was abused and driven away by those who first seemed to love him, but they afterward begged him to return.

Calvin went back to Geneva, where he preached, taught and made laws; and under his rule it became the wisest and most

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moral town in all Europe and the refuge of good men from every part of the world.

When he went back to Geneva the people were so glad to see him that they gave him a “plain house,” and also a “piece of cloth for a coat,” as somebody says.

Calvin was not at all fond of money. He took very little pay for his labors, and he gave nearly all he got to the poor.

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Though he was not rich as to this world, he was rich toward God.

The people grew so fond of him that they showed their love in very queer ways. Once they fined a man because he laughed when Calvin was preaching.

Calvin complained much of himself, and would say that he had a bad temper, which made him hate himself. He would

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say of it, "Oh, it is so hard for me to control this wild beast!"

Children should take great care to govern their tempers when they are young, or when they grow up their bad tempers will govern them.

Calvin had for friends the best men of his day. He could "grasp with warmth the hand of Luther," and all the tenderest and holiest of the pastors loved him well. They would

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not have loved a bad or cruel man.

Melanchthon, called often “the gentle,” from his sweetness of disposition, said of Calvin, “I am tired of the world and its strifes! Oh, if I could only lay my weary head on Calvin’s faithful heart and die!”

Over all the world went the influence of John Calvin. He did not become rich and high

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in station, as his proud father had hoped, but he became famous for wisdom and piety, and made himself felt in every land and in every year that has gone since his conversion.

Many people have written his life. His printed books are numerous. He is one of those who being dead yet speak.

As I told you, he injured his health in his youth by hard

study, which brought upon him many diseases, and a life of constant care and labor increased them.

At one time he had six hundred young men at Geneva to teach from the word of God.

I told you in another book that John Knox went to visit Calvin.

“John Calvin is turning the world mad,” said the pope, just as the heathen said Paul

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and his companions were turning the world upside down.

Another writer says this noble thing of him, “In all his life Calvin was never idle or faithless for a single day!”

Every Sunday he preached twice, and every other week he preached each day. He did not use notes, and his sermons were remarkable for three very important s's — *short, simple and solemn.*

He wrote once to a friend that his duties were so many that they kept him busy day and night, and so many letters did he have to answer that he had “no time to look up to the blessed sun.”

Even kings and noblemen were among his correspondents, and thought themselves much honored by a letter from him. Here we see the force of a steady adherence to the

cause of truth. Kings and philosophers revered and loved the grandson of the plain cooper, the maker of wine casks at Pont l'Eveque.

Calvin was fifty-five years old when he died, after having suffered long from many diseases. He was quite ill for nearly four months. His friends, his pupils, the officers of the church and the town council of Geneva visited him

often. All the ministers of the city came likewise. He gave them good advice, asked their forgiveness if he had offended any, and told them of his glad hope of heaven.

Though so ill, he kept on with the books he was writing, telling a friend what to write down for him.

He had very little money to leave, and what he had he ordered to be divided among

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poor foreigners who had come to Geneva to worship God in peace.

The college offered him the salary for the four months while he was sick, but that he would not take, saying he had no need for money now; he was going where God would supply all his need and make him priest and king for ever through Jesus his Lord.

Calvin forbade the people

of Geneva to put up any gravestone for him, and no one now knows in what spot of the cemetery his grave was made.

In two points Calvin's life should be a warning to young people. First, his passion for study led him to neglect the needs of his body in food, exercise and sleep; and thus he became weak, and was not able to do his life-work with

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that cheerfulness and comfort which he desired.

A strong, active mind should live in a healthy, hearty body, and we should not wear out the body while we push the mind to overwork.

Again, Calvin tells us that his temper was “a wild beast which it was hard for him to conquer.” This wild beast-called temper is born in nearly all of us, and we should

conquer this wild beast while it is young. Begin while you are children to make your temper your servant and not your master. You had better be a slave to almost anything except a bad temper.

Now I wish you for a moment to consider Calvin's nickname among his young mates and why he got it. They called him the "Accusative" because he accused sin so boldly

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—and you must remember that he accused sin in himself just as readily as in others. Such a name for such a cause was an honor. Wherever we see sin we should not be afraid to accuse and condemn it.

Calvin was brave; he had moral courage, the best courage of all. He was not afraid to do right for fear he should be laughed at. He was afraid to sin, afraid to offend God,

and he was not afraid to say so to any one.

Another very beautiful point in the character of Calvin was the love and honor he gave his parents. He obeyed the fifth commandment; the law of his father and his mother he kept in his heart, and God blesses every obedient child.

So full of truth and wisdom were John Calvin's books about religion that they went

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all over the world. He studied the Bible and he taught out of the Bible, and multitudes followed his teachings. They were thence called "Calvinists," and now "Calvinism" is the name given to the doctrines which he held.

In all your lives you will often hear the names of the great Reformers mentioned. When you grow up you can read large books about them,

which will interest you much ;
and you will be more likely to
read these large books when
you have as children read
some small books on the same
subject.

When you read or hear the
names of Calvin, of Huss or
of Luther, how nice it is to
feel that you know who they
were, where they were born
and a little of what they
did !

There is one comfort, too, in reading about real people: you do not feel when you get done that all is make-believe and you cannot tell any of it to any one as real true, “Indeed and double,” as small boys often say. But when you get through a tiny book about one of the Reformers, you can say, “Ah ha! I do know a little more than I did before I begun it—a little more of the

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history of the world and the great and good people who have been in it.”

Now you had better get a map and ask your mother to point you out Noyon, Paris, Orleans and Geneva, the towns where Calvin was born, lived, studied and died.