

**CALVIN'S APHORISMS
AND LETTER TO FRANCIS
THE FIRST, IN DEFENCE OF
THE REFORMATION**

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Calvin's Aphorisms and Letter to Francis the First, in Defence of the Reformation by Jean Calvin

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BY A GRADUATE OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY.

"Sufficit ut ad tempus simplex quiddam et uniforme
doceamur."—Tacitus De Oratoribus.

It sufficeth that instruction be simple, uniform, and in season.

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M D C C C X L I V .

PREFACE.

My aim, in the following publication, is to exhibit, in a brief form, the mind of John Calvin; what his opinions were on the subject of theology in general, and how he defended the Reformation in particular. The One Hundred Aphorisms, or General Principles, drawn from his profound work "The Institutes," probably by Beza, correctly portray the former; his letter to Francis the First contains a summary of the latter.

The restoration of these records of wholesome doctrine, and of an argumentative protest against error, to public consideration, after many years of undeserved oblivion, would seem to be an act of justice to Calvin, and of usefulness to Churches

which have so deeply imbibed both his spirit, and his language.

Christendom, released in a greater or less degree from the yoke of sacerdotal domination, and accustomed, as the case may be, courteously to tolerate, or reasonably to respect, the functionaries of religion, is, at the present hour, startled by the promulgation of a new crusade, ambitious to restore the visible Church of Christ to that supremacy from which it was dethroned at the Reformation; to constitute the clergy as sacrificers and dispensers of reconciliation,—as intercessors and mediators with God, rather than as his messengers and ministers; again, as depositaries rather than as expounders of religious truths; as donors, rather than as teachers of forgiveness through Christ; as successors of the Apostles by right of lineage, and literal descent, rather than by office, gifts, endowments; in brief, the end, if not the immediate object is, to exalt a Christian ministry as lords over God's heritage,

rather than as shepherds and examples to the flock. They who advocate, and they who impugn this lofty definition of the Clerical office, have pleaded their cause with much learning and subtilty, yet the additional testimony of a master mind, the evidence of Calvin, the great doctor of theology, may reasonably claim a hearing in this court of conscience. His sentiments, both as to the source and extent of a church's authority, and as to many other subjects of controversy at the present day, will be found embodied in his Dedication to Francis the First, and in the accompanying Aphorisms ; and may probably surprise many Christian brethren, who, calling themselves after his name, have departed from his doctrine.

Moreover, as the testimony of the Fathers of the Christian world, in divers ages and nations, has been appealed to in support of assumptions which are held by Protestants in general, not to be warranted by the awardment of God's word, and of a

doctrinal interpretation adverse to sound criticism and wholesome knowledge, though favourable to a retrograde movement of the human mind in these respects, it hence becomes of value to the argument to ascertain, what was the estimate in which these voluminous writers were held by Calvin, who was deeply acquainted with their works. On this subject he delivers his judgment with truth and candor, he grants the usefulness of these time-honoured doctors as witnesses, but denies their supremacy as masters. So confident was he that the general tenor of their opinions was favourable to the principles of a Reformed Church, that he hath fearlessly appealed to the verdict of the Fathers, and hath drawn a long chain of apposite extracts from their writings, as well as from the decrees of Councils and Popes. Hence he stops the cavils of opponents who brought against him the charge of novelty,—of a departure from ecclesiastical usage; and, at the same time, accredits his definition of the Church of Christ, not

as discoverable in external splendour and forms, but in the true preaching of God's word, and the lawful administration of the Sacraments.

A modern, living in the nineteenth century, if he calmly compares the Fathers prior to the Reformation with those posterior to this epoch, is tempted to prefer the latter as theologians. He bears in mind that the most ancient fathers, though worthy Christians, were not men of learning and sound judgment. It is undeniable that they believed in the Sibylline oracles* (forgeries), in the instant coming of a sensual Millenium, in a purgatorial fire after death, to prepare the souls of all believers for gradual accessions of glory, and in certain other fanciful conceits.

Their writings are occasionally as questionable as their opinions, and are suspected of corruptions and interpolations, specially the epistles attributed to Ignatius : at all events, they have not that impress

* See Blondel on the Sibylline oracles.