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## THE BIBLE A LITERARY NECESSITY.

PROF. W. W. MOORE.

This article can lay no claim to originality. It is made up largely of tributes to the literary excellence of the Bible which have been gathered from various sources. The printing of it at this time is suggested by statements in the daily papers concerning the success of Roman Catholic priests in their efforts to exclude the Bible from the public schools in certain communities of our country. It seems worth while to show that this book is necessary to our best intellectual culture and that it cannot be excluded from the schools in which the children of America are educated without subjecting them to an intellectual impoverishment to which our citizens should not consent. There are, of course, other and graver aspects of this subject, but with them the present paper is not directly concerned.

DeQuincey has drawn a suggestive distinction between the Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power. He says the function of the first is to *teach*, the function of the second is to *move*. The first is a rudder, the second is an oar or a sail. A cook book, in so far as it is literature at all, belongs to the literature of Knowledge. Milton's "Paradise Lost" belongs to the literature of Power. What do you learn from "Paradise Lost"? Nothing at all. What do you learn from a cook book? Something new, something you did not know before in every paragraph. But you would not for that

## THE BURNING OF SERVETUS.\*

BY WALTER L. LINGLE.

"No name in Church history—not even Hildebrand's or Luther's or Layola's—has been so much loved, and hated, admired and abhorred, praised and blamed, blessed and cursed, as that of John Calvin." These are the words of Dr. Philip Schaff. They are found in volume VII of his Church history. We can understand why John Calvin should be loved, but why should he be hated and blamed and cursed? The explanation lies largely in the subject that stands at the head of this paper. Michael Servetus was burned at the stake in Geneva, Switzerland, October 27, 1553. John Calvin had something to do with his death. For this he has been abhorred and cursed. It is not perfectly clear to the popular mind just what he had to do with it, but he had something to do with it and that is enough. Some seem to think that he was the judge who passed the sentence and signed the death warrant. Still others seem to think that he was the executioner and applied the torch with his own hand. Many think that he held the power of life and death in his hand in Geneva when Servetus was executed. We will see whether there is any ground for these beliefs as we proceed with our story.

As a sample of the curses heaped upon the head of John Calvin, I will quote a paragraph from Edward Gibbon, the great historian and skeptic. It is found in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. "I am more deeply scandalized at the simple execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which have blazed in the Auto de Fe's of Spain and Portugal. The zeal of Calvin seems to have been envenomed by personal malice and perhaps envy. He accused his adversary before their common enemies, the Judges of Vienna (Gibbon ought to have said Vienne), and betrayed for his destruction, the sacred trust of

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\*The substance of an address delivered before the Synod of Georgia.

a private correspondence. The deed of cruelty was not varnished by the pretence of danger to Church or State. In his passage through Geneva, Servetus was a harmless stranger, who neither preached, nor printed, nor made proselytes." Gibbou wrote these words back in the eighteenth century. He would not write them if he were living to-day. Much of Calvin's correspondence has come to light since Gibbon's day, and much light has been thrown on this dark tragedy in every way.

It is my purpose to tell as clearly as I can in short compass, without praise or blame, the story of the burning of Servetus and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. This story I have gathered from many sources.

## I.

To understand Calvin's part in the tragedy of Servetus, we must not only understand the age in which Calvin lived, but we must know the man John Calvin, and must understand the spirit with which he entered upon his work in Geneva. He did not take up the work at Geneva of his own accord. He was an exile from his native land of France for the gospel's sake, and was on his way to Basel. He had to pass through Geneva. It was his purpose to spend the night and pass on. William Farel had been preaching the Protestant doctrines in Geneva for four years. He needed help. He heard of John Calvin's presence in the city, sought him out, and urged him to come to his help. Calvin pleaded his studies. Then Farel rose like some Old Testament prophet and hurled this imprecation at him: "I declare unto thee on the part of God that if thou refuse to labor with us here in God's work, He will curse thee; for in pleading thy studies as an excuse for abandoning us thou seekest thyself more than God." Calvin says: "By this imprecation I was so stricken with terror that I desisted from the journey which I had undertaken." Never was Old Testament prophet more firmly convinced that he was called of God. In that spirit he entered upon his work. From that time forth God's enemies

were his enemies. "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? I hate them with perfect hatred." As the years went by he grew in his conviction that he was doing God's work in Geneva. He had not been in Geneva more than a year and a half until he was banished. His doctrines were too high and holy and his discipline too strict. He went to Strasburg and became pastor of the French refugees. This work suited his taste. He was perfectly happy there. But Geneva soon saw her mistake and called him back. He declined. The whole of Switzerland seemed to rise as a man to urge him to return to Geneva. But he was firm in his refusal. He did not want to go back. Again it was William Farel who saved the day. "Will you wait till the stones rise up and call thee?" So he wrote to Calvin. Again Calvin was greatly moved and yielded. He went back to Geneva in July, 1541, more firmly convinced than ever that God was calling him. He spent the rest of his life, twenty-three years, in Geneva, believing with all his heart that he was about his Father's business, and believing with all his heart that the man who interfered with that work was an enemy of God. We who live in these latter days, when men have so little conviction that they scarcely know whether they believe the multiplication table, find it difficult to understand the tremendous earnestness of John Calvin in contending for the faith. But we must understand this if we would understand even in a remote way his attitude towards Servetus.

## II.

We will now turn and look at Servetus for a moment. If we understand this story we must know and understand Servetus too. Almost all that we know of Servetus we have from his own lips. He tells us so many contradictory things about himself that it is hard to know what to believe. As well as we can make out, he was born in 1509, the same year in which Calvin was born. He was a native of Villanova, in Aragon. Calvin was a Frenchman. Servetus was a Spaniard. He was

almost, if not quite, as precocious as Calvin. His father sent him to the University of Toulouse to study law. A Bible fell into his hands. He soon broke with the Romish Church, but he did not ally himself with Protestantism. Indeed, he was as far away from Protestantism as he was from Romanism. There is no account of his conversion or of any great moral struggle in his life, such as most of the reformers had. He began to write early. When he was twenty-one years of age he published his first book. It was on "*The Errors of the Trinity.*" He assailed with great violence and irreverence this holy doctrine which had been held by the Church since the days of the apostles, and which had been formulated into a creed since the days of the Nicene Council. Protestants and Catholics alike were shocked and horrified at the irreverence and blasphemy of the book. The author soon found it wise to change his name and place of residence. He never lived under the name of Servetus again. Paris became his headquarters for some years. There he studied the sciences, geography, and medicine. He made a brilliant career in medicine and conjectured the circulation of the blood a hundred years before Harvey made his discovery. In Paris he met John Calvin in 1534. That was before Calvin ever went to Geneva. He challenged Calvin to a public debate. Calvin, at the risk of his own life, accepted, but when the appointed time came, Servetus was not there. Calvin did not see him again for nearly twenty years. Not a great while after this Servetus left Paris, but returned a year or two later. Upon his return he lectured in the University of Paris on Geography, Astrology, and Medicine. He was soon in a great conflict with the physicians, and was forbidden by the Parliament of Paris to lecture in the University. Soon afterwards he went to Vienne and settled down as a physician. There he spent the remaining thirteen years of his life from 1540 to 1553. He was given a room in the Archbishop's palace. During these years he posed as a good Roman Catholic, though he was busy all the while writing anonymous

books and letters against the most sacred doctrines of the Catholic Church.

### III.

We now come to the point where the lives of Calvin and Servetus begin to touch each other. Servetus had not been in Vienne very long until he opened up a correspondence with Calvin through their mutual friend Jean Frelon, of Lyons. This correspondence perhaps began as early as 1540, and continued until 1546. Calvin's letters are grave and dignified. He does not commit himself to Servetus. The letters of Servetus are often violent and abusive. Servetus was busy writing a new book, the greatest of all his books. It was called "*The Restitution of Christianity*." When his manuscript was done, he sent a copy of it to Calvin. In this book he repeated all the heresies and blasphemies in his former book and added to them. Still Calvin was patient, and in his letters endeavored to show Servetus the truth as he saw it. Servetus kept plying Calvin with all manner of theological questions. Calvin did not have time to answer them, and sent a copy of his *Institutes* and told Servetus that he would find all the answers in that. Servetus kept it for a while and returned it with all manner of marginal annotations. Calvin says: "There is hardly a page that is not defiled by his vomit." That was the beginning of the end. Calvin was ready to break off the correspondence. But Frelon, the mutual friend, pressed him for another letter. I give some quotations from his reply. The letter is dated February 13, 1546. "I will try once more if there be any means left of bringing him to reason, and this will happen when God shall have so wrought in him that he has become altogether another man. . . . I assure you that there is no lesson that he needs to learn so much as humility. This must come through the grace of God, not otherwise. But we, too, ought to lend a helping hand. If God give such grace to him and to us that the present answer will turn to his profit, I shall have cause to rejoice. If he persists, however, in the style he has

hitherto seen fit to use, you will only lose your time in soliciting me further in his behalf; for I have other affairs that concern me more nearly, and I shall make it a matter of conscience not to busy myself further, not doubting that he is a Satan who would divert me from more profitable studies." In the first part of this letter we see a man who is full of patience and tenderness trying to win an erring man back to the truth and to God; in the last part we see a man whose patience is exhausted. He believes that Servetus is an enemy of God, that he is a very Satan.

On that same day he sat down and wrote this letter to his friend and fellow-minister, William Farel: "Servetus lately wrote to me. . . . He offers to come hither if it be agreeable to me. But I am unwilling to pledge my word for his safety; for if he does come, and my authority be of any avail, I shall never suffer him to depart alive." The enemies of Calvin have made much of this letter. To my mind it is the gravest charge they have ever brought against him. Before we pronounce judgment, however, it is well to remember several things. We have just seen that Calvin, after many years of patience, had come to the place where he regarded Servetus as a Satan who was busy tearing down the kingdom of God. Would it be right to destroy the devil and his works? Not only so, if Calvin really had murder in his heart and wanted to destroy Servetus, there were two ways in which he could have done it. He could have allowed him to come on to Geneva; instead of that he wanted him to stay away. There was an easier way still. He could have sent a little note to the Archbishop of Vienne revealing the identity of Servetus. Vienne was not over one hundred miles from Geneva. Servetus lived there for thirteen years in the palace of the Archbishop under an assumed name. Calvin and a few of his intimate friends were probably the only people in all the world who knew Servetus' secret and were aware of his real identity. They knew that secret for thirteen years, and kept it. A word from Calvin to the Catholic authorities at any time during all those years

would have sent Servetus to the stake, but Calvin never spoke that word.

Calvin dropped the correspondence with Servetus in 1546. He felt that it was not for edification and that no good was being done. Seven years passed and then something happened. In January, 1553, Servetus secretly published his book entitled, "*The Restitution of Christianity.*" Its heresy and blasphemy shocked both the Catholic and Protestant world. A manuscript copy of the book had been in the hands of John Calvin for seven years, and yet he did not reveal the identity of the author even after the book was published. This is all really wonderful and ought to be put down to his everlasting credit.

But something happened. There was living in Geneva a man named William Trie. He was an intimate friend of Calvin's. He was a native of Lyons, but when he was converted to Protestantism he had to flee to Geneva for refuge. Trie kept up a correspondence with his cousin in Lyons. His cousin was named Arneys, and was a devout Catholic. Arneys made every endeavor to win Trie back to Catholicism, and finally reproached him for living in such an immoral city as Geneva, and for associating with such heretics as Calvin and the reformers. Trie replied that the morality of Geneva and the reformers was worthy of all commendation, and that it ill became Arneys to speak in this manner, when there was living in the Archbishop's palace at Vienne an arch-heretic "who blasphemed the holy Trinity, called Jesus Christ an idol, and the baptism of infants a diabolic invention." We will remember that this was a private correspondence between two cousins. It is impossible to trace minutely in a short paper all that followed. Arneys communicated this information to the Catholic authorities. Servetus was arrested. He denied that he was Servetus, or that he had done anything that would give offence to the Catholics. There was no proof against him except Trie's letter. Arneys wrote and told Trie what had happened, and asked for proof. Trie was in a terrible dilemma.



Calvin had all the proof. He had the letters of Servetus, the manuscript copy of his book, and the annotated copy of the *Institutes* which Servetus had returned. Would he turn these over to Trie? Would it be right for him to do it? I will let William Trie tell in his letter to Arneys what actually happened: "When I wrote the letter which you communicated to those who were in it accused of indifference, I did not think that the matter would have gone so far. My only intention was to let you see the fine zeal and devotion of those who call themselves the pillars of the Church, and yet allowed such evils to exist among them, whilst they harshly persecute poor Christians who desire nothing more than to serve God in simplicity. . . . I must confess that I have had much difficulty in obtaining from Monsieur Calvin that which I send you; not that he is unwilling that such execrable blasphemy should be punished, but that it seems to him that, since he does wield the sword of justice, it is his duty to confute heresy by sound doctrine, rather than to seek to extirpate it by any other method; but I have importuned him so greatly, representing that I should be charged with making reckless assertions unless he come to my aid, that at length he consented to give up what I send you." This letter is worthy of the most careful study.

With this new evidence in hand, the Catholic authorities at Vienne proceeded with the trial. The evidence was overwhelming, and yet Servetus declared to the end that he was not Servetus. He was sworn on the holy Gospels to tell the truth, and yet his testimony is full of all manner of contradictions. In the midst of the trial he made his escape from Vienne. The trial, however, proceeded as if he had been present. He was condemned and sentenced to be burned at the stake over a slow fire. In his absence his effigy and his books were burned on June 17, 1553.

#### IV.

This brings us to the tragedy at Geneva. With the whole world before him, where do you suppose Servetus went after

he escaped from Vienne? He went to Geneva. Why? Much depends upon the answer to this question. There is but one answer. He went there to enter into a life and death struggle with John Calvin. Servetus knew that there was a law on the statute book of Geneva that made heresy and blasphemy a capital offence. He knew the attitude of Calvin and the reformers towards him. He knew that he had been convicted at Vienne on evidence which William Trie secured from Calvin. He knew that Calvin had warned and urged him to stay away from Geneva. He knew that Geneva was the one place in all the world that he would be identified. Yet in the face of all this knowledge he went to Geneva, went straight to Calvin's church and took his seat. Why? He did it because he knew something else. He knew that Calvin had been banished from Geneva once. He knew that at this very moment Calvin's influence in Geneva was at its very lowest ebb. He knew that the majority in the Little Council, the real seat of authority in Geneva, was against John Calvin. In short, he knew that Calvin was living and working over a great powder magazine which only needed a match to touch it off. He believed that he could furnish the match. For this reason he went to Geneva. All this came out in the trial that followed. John Calvin knew these facts just as well as Servetus did. What was he to do? Was he to sit idly by and let this man send him to the stake or drive him out of Geneva and destroy his life work, which he believed was God's work? In the light of this twentieth century we would say that Calvin ought to have waited for Servetus to make the first move. But John Calvin did not live in the light of the twentieth century; besides Servetus had already made the first move when he came to Geneva. His very presence there was a firebrand. Calvin reported his presence to the authorities. Servetus was promptly arrested and brought to trial before the Little Council, which was a council of the State and not of the Church. John Calvin did not belong to the Council and had no vote. Not only so, but the majority

of the Council were Libertines and men who were stoutly opposed to Calvin.

The trial began August 15, 1553. We cannot trace it through all the details. Calvin appeared as a witness and prosecutor against Servetus. He drew up thirty-eight charges of heresy and blasphemy against him. These were taken from the writings of Servetus. The trial went on for over a month. On September 19, 1553, when the evidence was all in, a messenger of the State was sent with evidence to lay it before the magistrates and pastors and churches of Basel, Bern, Zurich, and Schaffhausen to get their judgment. On October 18th this messenger returned to Geneva with the answers of these four places. They were unanimous in the judgment that Servetus ought to be convicted and condemned. The form of punishment they left to Geneva. On October 26th Servetus was condemned by the Little Council and sentenced to be burned at the stake. Calvin was shocked at the form the sentence took, and tried to get it changed to death by the sword, but the Council would not listen to him. All during the trial Calvin had shown kindness to Servetus, even under the most exasperating circumstances. Among other things he loaned him books out of his own library that he might have every opportunity to make the best possible defense. In the last hours of Servetus, Calvin showed this same kindness. He wrote to Farel at Neuchatel and asked him to come and be a pastor to Servetus, knowing that a minister who lived in Geneva would hardly be acceptable. The last day of Servetus is full of pathos. He behaved himself like a Christian. The interview between him and Farel is touching to the last degree. Calvin was called in, and Servetus asked his forgiveness for all the hard things he had said. Calvin's reply is full of interest: "Sixteen years ago I spared no pains at Paris to gain you to our Lord. You then shunned the light. I did not cease to exhort you by letters, but all in vain. You have heaped upon me I know not how much fury rather than anger. But as to the rest I pass

by what concerns myself. Think rather of crying for mercy to God whom you have blasphemed."

On October 27, 1553, Servetus was led to the place of execution and burned, and the curtain falls on this terrible tragedy.

## V.

I have told as clearly and truthfully as I could this story from beginning to end. I have dwelt largely upon the causes leading up to the trial and death of Servetus, as I have felt that they throw more light on the case than the detailed events of the trial itself. Now let me sum up a few things which we ought to remember before we pass our final verdict on John Calvin:

1. That all this occurred in the sixteenth century, when the world was just emerging from the dark ages, and not in the light of the twentieth century.

2. That Servetus had been tried, condemned, and sentenced to be burned by the Roman Catholic Church, at Vienne, before he ever came to Geneva. This shows the spirit of the age, and seals the lips of every Roman Catholic.

3. That Servetus deliberately came to Geneva of his own accord, after his escape from Vienne, when he knew the law of Geneva and the attitude of Calvin. Why did he come? It was for a life and death struggle.

4. That in 1553 heresy was a crime punished with death throughout Europe.

5. That the charge against Servetus was not only heresy, but blasphemy. In fact, the emphasis was laid upon the latter. According to the Mosaic law blasphemy was a capital offense. See Leviticus 24: 16. John Calvin believed in the Old Testament with all his heart.

6. That John Calvin did not make the law under which Servetus died. It was on the statute books long before he came to Geneva.

7. That the Council which tried and condemned Servetus was anti-Calvin. The Libertines had a large majority. At

that very moment John Calvin was in constant danger of being banished from Geneva, and actually preached his farewell sermon.

8. That the case was submitted to the other Swiss cantons and churches, and that they were all in favor of convicting Servetus and getting rid of the pest, as one of them put it. The judgment of these other cantons had great weight with the Council of Geneva.

9. That the final verdict was approved by all the reformers even by the gentle Melancthon. Here is his letter to Calvin a year after the death of Servetus: "I have read your book in which you have clearly refuted the horrid blasphemies of Servetus; and I give thanks to the Son of God, who was the awarder of your crown of victory in this, your combat. To you also the Church owes gratitude at the present moment, and will owe it to the latest posterity. I perfectly assent to your opinion. I affirm also that your magistrates did right in punishing, after regular trial, this blasphemous man."

10. That Calvin made every endeavor to have the sentence changed from fire to the sword. He was not able to move the Council. This shows how little real power he had in Geneva at this time.

11. That the whole history of the Christian world would have been changed if Servetus had won in the struggle instead of Calvin.

12. That John Calvin was mortal. "The faults of Calvin were the faults of his age. His virtues are the virtues of all ages."

I began with a quotation from the historian and skeptic Edward Gibbon. Let me close with the verdict of a more brilliant and a greater skeptic, one who knew John Calvin far better than Gibbon, and who knew the Servetus story from beginning to end. Hear and ponder these words of Ernest Renan: "Calvin succeeded more than all, in an age and in a country which called for a reaction towards Christianity, simply because he was the most Christian man of his century."