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OF THE  
ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

HOLDING  
THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM

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EDITED BY THE  
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ease, self-indulgence, or compromise. It broke the back of priestly domination in England, and it may do that again. For it has always been the faith required for serious times.

We owe it much. Let no one think poorly of it, or be ashamed to preach it. Let no man speak lightly of it in your presence. Be true to it. It has done great things for us in the past. In all the changes of thought and circumstance its vigorous spirit will live, and it may have much to do for us yet.

The Rev. WILLIAM HENRY ROBERTS, D.D., LL.D., now read the following Paper on

### CALVINISTIC FORCES IN THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES.

The controlling power resident in ideas finds notable illustration in the Protestant Reformation, which began its work both in Church and State in the first part of the sixteenth century. Chief among the cardinal truths of that movement were the sovereignty of God ; the responsibility of every human being to God ; the fact that in his dealings with men God is no respecter of persons ; and the sovereignty over faith and conduct of the Holy Scriptures as the Law of God. These fundamental principles of the Reformation became, in the course of human events, political as well as religious forces. For truth, when accepted, affects all the interests of man, material, mental and political, as well as spiritual.

The formative principles of the Reformation bear in general the name of Calvin, because he above all other men gave them clear and cogent expression in speech. Many are the assaults which have been made both upon Calvin and Calvinism ; but the great Genevan, and the system of truth to which he gave expression, receive unwilling tributes even from opponents. An American writer who confessedly has no love for the mightiest of the Reformers, and who is bitterly opposed to his theological principles, says, "It would be hard to overrate the debt which mankind owe to Calvin."

Calvinism is declared by Froude to have been the chief source of the political progress of the last three centuries ; and Leopold Von Ranke gives his weighty judgment as to the relation of Calvinism to the United States in the words, "John Calvin was the virtual founder of America." These opinions indicate that Calvinism is clearly apprehended as a great political force by strong and deep thinkers, and form an appropriate introduction to the subject,

“ Calvinistic forces in the development of the national life of the United States.”

1. First: Consider the personal element. Note that the most influential and aggressive bodies of early colonists within the territory now known as the United States of America were Calvinists. Though of diverse nationalities they were yet of one faith. Commercial enterprise, and persecution in the Old World, both united to furnish a population for the coming republic. First among those upon the ground were the Dutch, who began the settlement of New York in 1614, who came as traders and farmers, and who were, prior to their advent, in the practice of popular government. Theologically, they were uncompromising Calvinists, having as a doctrinal standard the Canons of the Synod of Dort. Many Huguenots also found a refuge on American shores during the latter portion of the seventeenth century, and rejoiced in their adhesion to the faith expounded by their illustrious fellow-countrymen. During the eighteenth century, owing to war and persecution, many thousands of Germans settled in the American Colonies, at least one-half of whom were of the Reformed faith and professed the doctrines contained in the Heidelberg Catechism. The adherents of the Westminster Confession, however, were by far the most numerous and influential of the colonists. They came not only from Scotland, but from the North of Ireland, and from England and Wales. The early British settlers were all believers in the fundamental principles of Calvinism. The Congregationalists of New England adopted the Westminster Confession for doctrine at Cambridge, Mass., in 1648, one year after its completion at London. The Baptists adopted it in 1677, except as to Baptist peculiarities; and the Friends or Quakers accepted cordially the larger part of its principles. It is important to a clear understanding of the development of national life in the United States to remember that the majority of the early settlers from Massachusetts to Maryland inclusive, and also in considerable portions of Virginia and the Carolinas, were persons of Calvinistic belief and training. They brought with them those doctrinal ideas which exalt in the human mind the sovereignty of God, which bring all lives and institutions to the test of Holy Scripture, which emphasize individual responsibility, and which led American Calvinists logically to the conclusion that all men are born free and equal.

2. Think next upon the relation of Calvinism to that capacity for self-government which is characteristic of the American people.

This capacity might be accounted for in part by the presence of powerful British elements in the population. But the American is something more than a Briton. The nation is composite, and no explanation of the capacity of its citizens for self-government is in any degree adequate which fails to take into account the influence of the doctrine of individual responsibility to God, and the moulding power of popular government in the Church. Calvinism teaches personal responsibility as no other system of truth does. It emphasizes the rights of others as well as one's own rights, and warns sharply of the coming judgment which will reward every man according to his works. Thus teaching, it cut the bonds of social prejudice in every direction, encouraged human beings to fashion their lives according to the commands of God, and brought conscience to bear upon the relations of men one to another. Training men to be the efficient servants of God, it built up within them individuality in all its forms, and then placed them in the congregations of believers to engage in the practice of popular government and the duties of Christian fellowship. The doctrine of personal responsibility led naturally to the development of the personal qualities appropriate to citizenship in the Church of God, and that led as naturally to the development of like qualities in civil relations.

3. Next consider the relation of Calvinism to popular education. The education of all citizens is now regarded in this land as fundamental to the national welfare, and that not as a privilege but as a right of the people. This position, however, is a logical result of Calvinistic thought and practice. Education in religious truth for all persons was a cardinal principle of the early Calvinists, and the steps were easy and swift from it to general secular popular education. This logical connection between Calvinists and education is acknowledged by the American historian Bancroft, who says, that "Calvin was the first founder of the public school system." The first settlers in New England and the Middle States being Calvinists, they 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 a 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 men who believed in Calvinism spread through the colonies, and to-day the right of all persons to become, through instruction, intelligent citizens, is fully recognized in the great Republic.

4. Another cardinal principle of the organized life of the American nation is the separation between Church and State, with its resulting religious freedom for the individual. The great Presbyterian principle, "that God alone is Lord of the conscience," seems to American Christians to involve of necessity individual liberty in religious opinion. 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. Gradually the doctrine of religious liberty won its way to recognition in New England and Virginia, 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, in part by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church, and in part by the Congregational Association of Connecticut. The moment that religious liberty was seriously threatened by the schemes of a Church 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 thorough-going devotion to the cause of religious liberty. They stood shoulder to shoulder in opposition to threatening ecclesiastical tyranny, and their courage and high intelligence paved the way as no other influence could have done for the political movement known as the American Revolution.

Having dealt with religious liberty, we turn to the consideration of the relation of the American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches to the civil liberty which was secured by the independence of the United States. The opening of the Revolutionary struggle found their ministers and members ranged solidly on the side of the colonies. So resolute and aggressive were the Calvinists in their opposition to the English Government that the Colonial Cause was repeatedly spoken of in Great Britain as the "Presbyterian

Rebellion." It is estimated that of the 3,000,000 Americans at the time of the Revolution of 1776, 900,000 were of Scotch or Scotch-Irish origin; that the Germans and Dutch numbered 400,000, and the Puritan English 600,000, so that nearly two-thirds of the Colonists were sprung from Calvinistic ancestors. The British armies upon American soil were confronted, therefore, by the Calvinistic Reformation in battle array, by men who had inherited from heroic sires a resolute loyalty to the rights of man.

We pass now to the relation of the Presbyterian Churches to the American republic in connection with its organized government. Several particulars emphasize the importance of this relation. First is the fact that from 1706 to the opening of the revolutionary struggle in 1774 the only body in continuous existence which stood for the present national political organization of the United States was the General Synod of the American Presbyterian Church. The Colonies in the eighteenth century, 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. The Episcopal Church was without organization in the Colonies, and was dependent for support and a ministry on the Established Church of England. The Reformed Dutch Church did not become an 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. Gathering every year in the Synod, the Church became a bond of union and correspondence between large elements in the population of the divided Colonies, and taught and illustrated government by the people, and for the people. Too much emphasis cannot be laid, in connection with the origin of the American nation, upon the influence of that ecclesiastical Republic, which from 1706 to 1774 was the only representative on this Continent of those fully developed popular political institutions, which are one of the results of the Protestant Reformation. Again,

the federative principle which is found in the Government of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches became the dominant principle in the political organization of the United States. The main hindrance to the formation of the federal union, from 1783 to 1787, lay in the reluctance of many of the former Colonies, suddenly become States, to yield to a general government any of the powers which they possessed. But Presbyterians, both in the Old World and the New, had been accustomed to representative government, to the subordination of all the parts to the whole, and to the rule of majorities, for more than two centuries prior to the American Revolution. They labored earnestly and persistently, therefore, until the principle of federation was accepted by the American people, and the divided Colonies became the United States of America.

A third particular connected with this part of our topic is the unquestioned influence in the formation of the American Constitution as a whole, of such men as John Witherspoon, Elias Boudinot, Alexander Hamilton, James Wilson, and other influential leaders who might be named. Into this matter, however, time does not permit entrance in detail. It suffices that all that has been said, or could be said, would simply be the affirmation in other words of the statement made by the historian Bancroft, that "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."

It is of course needful to acknowledge that the political ideas inherent in Calvinism have been largely accepted and acted upon by men who were not in connection with any Presbyterian or Reformed Church, and are to-day in operation in denominations of Christians which bear other than the Presbyterian name. But whatever of credit may be accorded to other forces and agencies, it must be admitted that certain elements of the Calvinistic system have been greatly influential in making the United States of America that which they are as a nation. In a very significant sense, there is found in the American Republic, the Switzerland of Ulrich Zwingli, the France of Coligny, the Holland of William the Silent, the Germany of Olevianus, the England of Cromwell, and the Scotland of John Knox.

Concisely I have endeavored to describe the relation of Calvinism

to American national life. In answer to the question, What have the principles of the Calvinists done for the Republic, we look over the broad national domains, and as we see the 70,000,000 of Americans 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 mightily aided in securing. 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! The fundamental principles of Calvinism are maintained to-day in this land not only by the members of 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 divine decree hath ordained thee to be an indestructible union of indestructible States, the leader of the hopes of mankind, the majority of thy citizens 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.