THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

1 - 13

Commentaries On The Acts Vol. 1

John Calvin

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John Calvin - A Biography

By William Barry

This man, undoubtedly the greatest of Protestant divines, and perhaps, after St. Augustine, the most perseveringly followed by his disciples of any Western writer on theology, was born at Noyon in Picardy, France, 10 July, 1509, and died at Geneva, 27 May, 1564.

A generation divided him from Luther, whom he never met. By birth, education, and temper these two protagonists of the reforming movement were strongly contrasted. Luther was a Saxon peasant, his father a miner; Calvin sprang from the French middle-class, and his father, an attorney, had purchased the freedom of the City of Noyon, where he practised civil and canon law. Luther entered the Order of Augustinian Hermits, took a monk's vows, was made a priest and incurred much odium by marrying a nun. Calvin never was ordained in the Catholic Church; his training

was chiefly in law and the humanities; he took no vows. Luther's eloquence made him popular by its force, humour, rudeness, and vulgar style. Calvin spoke to the learned at all times, even when preaching before multitudes. His manner is classical; he reasons on system; he has little humour; instead of striking with a cudgel he uses the weapons of a deadly logic and persuades by a teacher's authority, not by a demagogue's calling of names. He writes French as well as Luther writes German, and like him has been reckoned a pioneer in the modern development of his native tongue. Lastly, if we term the doctor of Wittenberg a mystic, we may sum up Calvin as a scholastic; he gives articulate expression to the principles which Luther had stormily thrown out upon the world in his vehement pamphleteering; and the "Institutes" as they were left by their author have remained ever since the standard of orthodox Protestant belief in all the Churches known as "Reformed." His French disciples called their sect "the religion"; such it has proved to be outside the Roman world.

The family name, spelt in many ways, was Cauvin latinized according to the custom of the age as Calvinus. For some unknown reason the Reformer is commonly called Maître Jean C. His mother, Jeanne Le Franc, born in the Diocese of Cambrai, is mentioned as "beautiful and devout"; she took her little son to various shrines and brought him up a good Catholic. On the father's side, his ancestors were seafaring men. His grandfather settled at Pont l'Evêque near Paris, and had two sons who became locksmiths; the third was Gerard, who turned procurator at Noyon, and there his four sons and two daughters saw the light. He lived in the Place au Blé (Cornmarket). Noyon, a bishop's see, had long been a fief of the powerful old family of Hangest, who treated it as their personal property. But an everlasting quarrel, in which the city took part, went on between the bishop and

the chapter. Charles de Hangest, nephew of the too well-known Georges d'Amboise, Archbishop of Rouen, surrendered the bishopric in 1525 to his own nephew John, becoming his vicar-general. John kept up the battle with his canons until the Parliament of Paris intervened, upon which he went to Rome, and at last died in Paris in 1577. This prelate had Protestant kinsfolk; he is charged with having fostered heresy which in those years was beginning to raise its head among the French. Clerical dissensions, at all events, allowed the new doctrines a promising field; and the Calvins were more or less infected by them before 1530.

Gerard's four sons were made clerics and held benefices at a tender age. The Reformer was given one when a boy of twelve, he became Curé of Saint-Martin de Marteville in the Vermandois in 1527, and of Pont l'Evegue in 1529. Three of the boys attended the local Collège des Capettes, and there John proved himself an apt scholar. But his people were intimate with greater folk, the de Montmor, a branch of the line of Hangest, which led to his accompanying some of their children to Paris in 1523, when his mother was probably dead and his father had married again. The latter died in 1531, under excommunication from the chapter for not sending in his accounts. The old man's illness, not his lack of honesty, was, we are told, the cause. Yet his son Charles, nettled by the censure, drew towards the Protestant doctrines. He was accused in 1534 of denying the Catholic dogma of the Eucharist, and died out of the Church in 1536; his body was publicly gibbeted as that of a recusant.

Meanwhile, young John was going through his own trials at the University of Paris, the dean or syndic of which, Noel Bédier, had stood up against Erasmus and bore hard upon Le Fèvre d'Etaples (Stapulensis), celebrated for his

translation of the Bible into French. Calvin, a "martinet", or oppidan, in the Collèege de la Marche, made this man's acquaintance (he was from Picardy) and may have glanced into his Latin commentary on St. Paul, dated 1512, which Doumerque considers the first Protestant book emanating from a French pen. Another influence tending the same way was that of Corderius, Calvin's tutor, to whom he dedicated afterwards his annotation of I Thessalonians, remarking, "if there be any good thing in what I have published, I owe it to you". Corderius had an excellent Latin style, his life was austere, and his "Colloquies" earned him enduring fame. But he fell under suspicion of heresy, and by Calvin's aid took refuge in Geneva, where he died September 1564. A third herald of the "New Learning" was George Cop, physician to Francis I, in whose house Calvin found a welcome and gave ear to the religious discussions which Cop favoured. And a fourth was Pierre-Robert d'Olivet of Noyon, who also translated the Scriptures, our youthful man of letters, his nephew, writing (in 1535) a Latin preface to the Old Testament and a French one — his first appearance as a native author — to the New Testament.

By 1527, when no more than eighteen, Calvin's education was complete in its main lines. He had learned to be a humanist and a reformer. The "sudden conversion" to a spiritual life in 1529, of which he speaks, must not be taken quite literally. He had never been an ardent Catholic; but the stories told at one time of his ill-regulated conduct have no foundation; and by a very natural process he went over to the side on which his family were taking their stand. In 1528 he inscribed himself at Orléans as a law student, made friends with Francis Daniel, and then went for a year to Bourges, where he began preaching in private. Margaret d'Angoulême, sister of Francis I, and Duchess of Berry, was living there with many heterodox Germans about her.

He is found again at Paris in 1531. Wolmar had taught him Greek at Bourges; from Vatable he learned Hebrew; and he entertained some relations with the erudite Budaeus. About this date he printed a commentary on Seneca's "De Clementiâ". It was merely an exercise in scholarship, having no political significance. Francis I was, indeed, handling Protestants severely, and Calvin, now Doctor of Law at Orléans, composed, so the story runs, an oration on Christian philosophy which Nicholas Cop delivered on All Saints' Day, 1532, both writer and speaker having to take instant flight from pursuit by the royal inquisitors. This legend has been rejected by modern critics. Calvin spent some time, however, with Canon du Tillet at Angoulême under a feigned designation. In May, 1534, he went to Novon, gave up his benefice, and, it is said, was imprisoned. But he got away to Nerac in Bearn, the residence of the Duchess Margaret, and there again encountered Le Fèvre, whose French Bible had been condemned by the Sorbonne to the flames. His next visit to Paris fell out during a violent campaign of the Lutherans against the Mass, which brought on reprisals, Etienne de la Forge and others were burnt in the Place de Grève; and Calvin accompanied by du Tillet, escaped — though not without adventures — to Metz and Strasburg. In the latter city Bucer reigned supreme. The leading reformers dictated laws from the pulpit to their adherents, and this journey proved a decisive one for the French humanist, who, though by nature timid and shy, committed himself to a war on paper with his own sovereign. The famous letter to Francis I is dated 23 August, 1535. It served as a prologue to the "Institutes", of which the first edition came out in March, 1536, not in French but in Latin. Calvin's apology for lecturing the king was, that placards denouncing the Protestants as rebels had been posted up all over the realm. Francis I did not read these pages, but if

he had done so he would have discovered in them a plea, not for toleration, which the Reformer utterly scorned, but for doing away with Catholicism in favour of the new gospel. There could be only one true Church, said the young theologian, therefore kings ought to make an utter end of popery. (For an account of the "Institutes" see) The second edition belongs to 1539, the first French translation to 1541; the final Latin, as revised by its author, is of 1559; but that in common use, dated 1560, has additions by his disciples. "It was more God's work than mine", said Calvin, who took for his motto "Omnia ad Dei gloriam", and in allusion to the change he had undergone in 1529 assumed for his device a hand stretched out from a burning heart.

A much disputed chapter in Calvin's biography is the visit which he was long thought to have paid at Ferraro to the Protestant Duchess Renée, daughter of Louis XII. Many stories clustered about his journey, now given up by the best-informed writers. All we know for certain is that the Reformer, after settling his family affairs and bringing over two of his brothers and sisters to the views he had adopted undertook, in consequence of the war between Charles V and Francis I, to reach Bale by way of Geneva, in July, 1536. At Geneva the Swiss preacher Fare, then looking for help in his propaganda, besought him with such vehemence to stay and teach theology that, as Calvin himself relates, he was terrified into submission. We are not accustomed to fancy the austere prophet so easily frightened. But as a student and recluse new to public responsibilities, he may well have hesitated before plunging into the troubled waters of Geneva, then at their stormiest period. No portrait of him belonging to this time is extant. Later he is represented as of middle height, with bent shoulders, piercing eyes, and a large forehead; his hair was of an auburn tinge. Study and fasting occasioned the severe headaches from which he suffered continually. In private

life he was cheerful but sensitive, not to say overbearing, his friends treated him with delicate consideration. His habits were simple; he cared nothing for wealth, and he never allowed himself a holiday. His correspondence, of which 4271 letters remain, turns chiefly on doctrinal subjects. Yet his strong, reserved character told on all with whom he came in contact; Geneva submitted to his theocratic rule, and the Reformed Churches accepted his teaching as though it were infallible.

Such was the stranger whom Farel recommended to his fellow Protestants, "this Frenchman", chosen to lecture on the Bible in a city divided against itself. Geneva had about 15,000 inhabitants. Its bishop had long been its prince limited, however, by popular privileges. The vidomne, or mayor, was the Count of Savoy, and to his family the bishopric seemed a property which, from 1450, they bestowed on their younger children. John of Savoy, illegitimate son of the previous bishop, sold his rights to the duke, who was head of the clan, and died in 1519 at Pignerol. Jean de la Baume, last of its ecclesiastical princes, abandoned the city, which received Protestant teachers from Berne in 1519 and from Fribourg in 1526. In 1527 the arms of Savoy were torn down; in 1530 the Catholic party underwent defeat, and Geneva became independent. It had two councils, but the final verdict on public measures rested with the people. These appointed Farel, a convert of Le Fevre, as their preacher in 1534. A discussion between the two Churches from 30 May to 24 June, 1535 ended in victory for the Protestants. The altars were desecrated, the sacred images broken, the Mass done away with. Bernese troops entered and "the Gospel" was accepted, 21 May, 1536. This implied persecution of Catholics by the councils which acted both as Church and State. Priests were thrown into prison; citizens were fined for not attending sermons. At Zürich, Basle, and Berne the same laws were

established. Toleration did not enter into the ideas of the time.

But though Calvin had not introduced this legislation, it was mainly by his influence that in January, 1537 the "articles" were voted which insisted on communion four times a year, set spies on delinquents, established a moral censorship, and punished the unruly with excommunication. There was to be a children's catechism, which he drew up; it ranks among his best writings. The city now broke into "jurants" and "nonjurors" for many would not swear to the "articles"; indeed, they never were completely accepted. Questions had arisen with Berne touching points that Calvin judged to be indifferent. He made a figure in the debates at Lausanne defending the freedom of Geneva. But disorders ensued at home, where recusancy was yet rife; in 1538 the council exiled Farel, Calvin, and the blind evangelist, Couraud. The Reformer went to Strasburg, became the guest of Capito and Bucer, and in 1539 was explaining the New Testament to French refugees at fifty two florins a year. Cardinal Sadolet had addressed an open letter to the Genevans, which their exile now answered. Sadolet urged that schism was a crime; Calvin replied that the Roman Church was corrupt. He gained applause by his keen debating powers at Hagenau, Worms, and Ratisbon. But he complains of his poverty and ill-health, which did not prevent him from marrying at this time Idelette de Bure, the widow of an Anabaptist whom he had converted. Nothing more is known of this lady, except that she brought him a son who died almost at birth in 1542, and that her own death took place in 1549.

After some negotiation Ami Perrin, commissioner for Geneva, persuaded Calvin to return. He did so, not very willingly, on 13 September, 1541. His entry was modest enough. The church constitution now recognized "pastors,

doctors, elders, deacons" but supreme power was given to the magistrate. Ministers had the spiritual weapon of God's word; the consistory never, as such, wielded the secular arm Preachers, led by Calvin, and the councils, instigated by his opponents, came frequently into collision. Yet the ordinances of 1541 were maintained; the clergy, assisted by lay elders, governed despotically and in detail the actions of every citizen. A presbyterian Sparta might be seen at Geneva; it set an example to later Puritans, who did all in their power to imitate its discipline. The pattern held up was that of the Old Testament, although Christians were supposed to enjoy Gospel liberty. In November, 1552, the Council declared that Calvin's "Institutes" were a "holy doctrine which no man might speak against." Thus the State issued dogmatic decrees, the force of which had been anticipated earlier, as when Jacques Gouet was imprisoned on charges of impiety in June, 1547, and after severe torture was beheaded in July. Some of the accusations brought against the unhappy young man were frivolous, others doubtful. What share, if any, Calvin took in this judgment is not easy to ascertain. The execution of however must be laid at his door; it has given greater offence by far than the banishment of Castellio or the penalties inflicted on Bolsec — moderate men opposed to extreme views in discipline and doctrine, who fell under suspicion as reactionary. The Reformer did not shrink from his self-appointed task. Within five years fifty-eight sentences of death and seventy-six of exile, besides numerous committals of the most eminent citizens to prison, took place in Geneva. The iron voke could not be shaken off. In 1555, under Ami Perrin, a sort of revolt was attempted. No blood was shed, but Perrin lost the day, and Calvin's theocracy triumphed.

"I am more deeply scandalized", wrote Gibbon "at the single execution of Servetus than at the hecatombs which

have blazed in the autos-da-fé of Spain and Portugal". He ascribes the enmity of Calvin to personal malice and perhaps envy. The facts of the case are pretty well ascertained. Born in 1511, perhaps at Tudela, Michael Served y Reves studied at Toulouse and was present in Bologna at the coronation of Charles V. He travelled in Germany and brought out in 1531 at Hagenau his treatise "De Trinitatis Erroribus", a strong Unitarian work which made much commotion among the more orthodox Reformers. He met Calvin and disputed with him at Paris in 1534, became corrector of the press at Lyons; gave attention to medicine, discovered the lesser circulation of the blood, and entered into a fatal correspondence with the dictator of Geneva touching a new volume "Christianismi Restitutio," which he intended to publish. In 1546 the exchange of letters ceased. The Reformer called Servetus arrogant (he had dared to criticize the "Institutes" in marginal glosses), and uttered the significant menace, "If he comes here and I have any authority, I will never let him leave the place alive." The "Restitutio" appeared in 1553. Calvin at once had its author delated to the Dominican inquisitor Ory at Lyons, sending on to him the man's letters of 1545-46 and these glosses. Hereupon the Spaniard was imprisoned at Vienne, but he escaped by friendly connivance, and was burnt there only in effigy. Some extraordinary fascination drew him to Geneva, from which he intended to pass the Alps. He arrived on 13 August, 1553. The next day Calvin, who had remarked him at the sermon, got his critic arrested, the preacher's own secretary coming forward to accuse him. Calvin drew up forty articles of charge under three heads, concerning the nature of God, infant baptism, and the attack which Servetus had ventured on his own teaching. The council hesitated before taking a deadly decision, but the dictator, reinforced by Farel, drove them on. In prison the culprit suffered much and loudly complained. The Bernese and

other Swiss voted for some indefinite penalty. But to Calvin his power in Geneva seemed lost, while the stigma of heresy; as he insisted, would cling to all Protestants if this innovator were not put to death. "Let the world see" Bullinger counselled him, "that Geneva wills the glory of Christ."

Accordingly, sentence was pronounced 26 October, 1553, of burning at the stake. "Tomorrow he dies," wrote Calvin to Farel. When the deed was done, the Reformer alleged that he had been anxious to mitigate the punishment, but of this fact no record appears in the documents. He disputed with Servetus on the day of execution and saw the end. A defence and apology next year received the adhesion of the Genevan ministers. Melanchthon, who had taken deep umbrage at the blasphemies of the Spanish Unitarian, strongly approved in well-known words. But a group that included Castellio published at Basle in 1554 a pamphlet with the title, "Should heretics be persecuted?" It is considered the first plea for toleration in modern times. Beza replied by an argument for the affirmative, couched in violent terms; and Calvin, whose favorite disciple he was, translated it into French in 1559. The dialogue, "Vaticanus", written against the "Pope of Geneva" by Castellio, did not get into print until 1612. Freedom of opinion, as Gibbon remarks, "was the consequence rather than the design of the Reformation."

Another victim to his fiery zeal was Gentile, one of an Italian sect in Geneva, which also numbered among its adherents Alciati and Gribaldo. As more or less Unitarian in their views, they were required to sign a confession drawn up by Calvin in 1558. Gentile subscribed it reluctantly, but in the upshot he was condemned and imprisoned as a perjurer. He escaped only to be twice incarcerated at Berne, where in 1566, he was beheaded. Calvin's

impassioned polemic against these Italians betrays fear of the Socinianism which was to lay waste his vineyard. Politically he leaned on the French refugees, now abounding in the city, and more than equal in energy — if not in numbers — to the older native factions. Opposition died out. His continual preaching, represented by 2300 sermons extant in the manuscripts and a vast correspondence, gave to the Reformer an influence without example in his closing years. He wrote to Edward VI, helped in revising the Book of Common Prayer, and intervened between the rival English parties abroad during the Marian period. In the Huguenot troubles he sided with the more moderate. His censure of the conspiracy of Amboise in 1560 does him honour. One great literary institution founded by him, the College, afterwards the University, of Geneva, flourished exceedingly. The students were mostly French. When Beza was rector it had nearly 1500 students of various grades.

Geneva now sent out pastors to the French congregations and was looked upon as the Protestant Rome. Through Knox, "the Scottish champion of the Swiss Reformation", who had been preacher to the exiles in that city, his native land accepted the discipline of the Presbytery and the doctrine of predestination as expounded in Calvin's "Institutes". The Puritans in England were also descendants of the French theologian. His dislike of theatres, dancing and the amenities of society was fully shared by them. The town on Lake Leman was described as without crime and destitute of amusements. Calvin declaimed against the "Libertines", but there is no evidence that any such people had a footing inside its walls The cold, hard, but upright disposition characteristic of the Reformed Churches, less genial than that derived from Luther, is due entirely to their founder himself. Its essence is a concentrated pride, a love of disputation, a scorn of opponents. The only art that

it tolerates is music, and that not instrumental. It will have no Christian feasts in its calendar, and it is austere to the verge of Manichaean hatred of the body. When dogma fails the Calvinist, he becomes, as in the instance of Carlyle, almost a pure Stoic. "At Geneva, as for a time in Scotland," says J. A. Froude, "moral sins were treated as crimes to be punished by the magistrate." The Bible was a code of law, administered by the clergy. Down to his dying day Calvin preached and taught. By no means an aged man, he was worn out in these frequent controversies. On 25 April, 1564, he made his will, leaving 225 French crowns, of which he bequeathed ten to his college, ten to the poor, and the remainder to his nephews and nieces. His last letter was addressed to Farel. He was buried without pomp, in a spot which is not now ascertainable. In the year 1900 a monument of expiation was erected to Servetus in the Place Champel. Geneva has long since ceased to be the head of Calvinism. It is a rallying point for Free Thought, Socialist propaganda, and Nihilist conspiracies. But in history it stands out as the Sparta of the Reformed churches, and Calvin is its Lycurgus.

EDITORS PREFACE

THE present COMMENTARY, necessarily partaking of the character of the Book which it is designed to illustrate, is more historical than doctrinal; and hence does not contain so much profound theological discussion as some of Calvin's other Commentaries. The leading topic is the progress of the Gospel under the inspired teachers to whom its first propagation was entrusted, and, in immediate connection with this, the Constitution of the Apostolic Church, and the privileges enjoyed by its

members. To this latter point the attention of the religious world is now more especially directed; and whatever be the views entertained with regard to it by any reader into whose hands this Commentary may fall, if he feels aright, he will not think that his study of the controversy is complete until he has made himself acquainted with what has been said upon it by such a man as Calvin.

A work of talent need not be either the less interesting or the less instructive that it advocates views at variance with our own. If our opinions have been deliberately and candidly formed, it is a satisfactory test of their soundness when they continue unshaken by all that the ablest opponent can urge against them.

The Translation appears to be well executed. It is, perhaps, not so strictly literal as that of the Commentary on the Romans, which the CALVIN SOCIETY has already published; but any difference, in this respect, is more than compensated by the general superiority of its style. There are occasional obscurities or mistranslations which the Editor has endeavored, as in the Commentary on the Romans, to remove by foot-notes; but, on the whole, it is believed that the present Translation will not suffer by comparison with that of any Theological Translation of the same period.

H. B.

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE THE LORD HENRY, EARL OF HUNTINGTON,

LORD HASTINGS, ETC.,

Knight Of The Most Honorable Order Of The Garter, And Lord President Of The Queen's Majesty's Counsel Established In The North Parts,

CHRISTOPHER FETHERSTONE WISHETH INCREASE OF SPIRITUAL GIFTS, LONG LIFE, AND HAPPY DAYS.

If that (Right Honorable) I should prefix any long and tedious preface before this work in commendation of your honor, — I should of some be suspected of flattery; if in praise of these learned Commentaries, — it should seem a thing superfluous, seeing they sufficiently commend themselves; if in excuse of those faults which are by me in translating hereof committed, — some censuring Cato would condemn me, because I would take in hand a work so weighty, being not able to be without fault, and by craving pardon for faults laying open my folly. Omitting, therefore, those things which might carry with them such inconveniences, I hasten unto that whereof I am chiefly to speak; namely, to lay open the causes moving me to dedicate this my simple translation unto your honor.

Your deserts of God's church, your singular zeal, your unfeigned faith, your sincere profession, your especial care to advance God's glory, and to root out Papistry, your faithfulness towards your prince, have been such, that this realm generally, but my countrymen in the north parts, my native soil, specially, have, and shall have, great cause to praise God for you in the day of their visitation, even when it shall please God of his great mercy to behold them with favor-able countenance, and to take from them in greater measure that blindness and superstition, wherein they had been long time nousled, and being fast bred by the bone, is not yet (through want of means) gotten out of the flesh. Seeing all these virtues are in you to be found; seeing both this church and country have found you so beneficial,

whom ought not these things to provoke to show all thankfulness towards your honor?

Again, when this history of the Acts of the Apostles was first penned in Greek by Luke, it was dedicated to noble Theophilus. When M. Calvin did the second time publish his Commentaries thereupon in Latin, he presented them unto one who was in mind a noble Theophilus. Lest, therefore, this work, now published in English, should by dedication be any whit debased, I have made choice of your honor, being no less a noble Theophilus than those before mentioned.

Another thing, which is not so much a cause as an encouragement, is that courtesy which your honor showeth to those which present unto you any exercises of learning, how simple soever they be, whereof I have had full good experience even in my tender years; namely, at such time as I was trained up in the city of Carlisle, under that man, in his calling painful, and to the commonwealth profitable, M. Hayes, whom for that duty which to him I owe I name. At which time, though those exercises which unto your honor we then presented were simple, yet were they so courteously of you received, that the remembrance thereof doth even now encourage me to presume to offer unto you some weightier matter.

The last, but not the least, is, the consideration of that great and undeserved kindness, which all my friends in general, but especially my brother, your honor's servant, have found at your hands, which, to rip up at large, would be too tedious. In their behalf, therefore, Right Honorable, as also in mine own, as a small testimony of a thankful heart, I present unto your honor this work; simple, if you respect the translation, but most excellent, if you consider the matter. And thus, humbly craving pardon for my

boldness, and much more humbly beseeching the Lord to bless you in the reading hereof, I conclude, fearing prolixity. The Lord of heaven bless you, and grant that: as you have been heretofore a good Theophilus, so you may continue to the glory of God, the increasing of his Church, and the profit of this commonwealth.

From Maighfield in Sussex, this 12th of October, 1585.

Your Honor's most humble and obedient, and in Christ at commandment,

CHRISTOPHER FETHERSTONE.

THE EPISTLE TO THE READER.

THOU hast at length, (Christian reader,) through the blessing of God, wherewith he hath blessed my labors, those learned Commentaries of M. Calvin upon the Acts of the Apostles, though simply, yet faithfully, turned into English; and though of many I was the unmeetest to attempt this travail, yet such was the earnest request of my godly friends, that unless I should have taken it in hand, I should have seemed void of courtesy, and also of care to profit God's Church. I will not stand to rip up those commodities which thou by reading these Commentaries mayest reap, but I leave them to thine own experience. What my travail hath been in this work, those who have endured like toll can best judge. And forasmuch as I know well, that after great painstaking some things have escaped me, I beseech thee, (gentle reader,) condemn me not rashly, but rather amend them friendly. If thou shalt grow forward in *knowledge* by reading this work, then praise God, who hath by this means made thee profit. God give thee good

success in reading, that thereby thou mayest both be better learned, and also better lived.

Thine in the Lord, CHRISTOPHER FETHERSTONE.

TO THE MOST RENOWNED PRINCE, THE LORD NICOLAS RADZIWILL, DUKE IN OLIKA,

COUNTY PALATINE OF VILNA, CHIEF MARSHAL, AND HEAD CHANCELLOR OF THE GREAT DUKEDOM OF LITHUANIA, ETC.,

HIS LORD HIGHLY TO BE REVERENCED, JOHN CALVIN.

WHEREAS I have made mention of the names of those kings unto whom I had dedicated these my Commentaries, lest the change incur the crime of lightness among certain unskillful men, I must briefly render some reason thereof. For although both the remembrance of the father, who is dead, doth retain that reverence with me which it deserveth, and I do also, as becometh me, reverence the son; yet the importunities of certain did enforce me to put out F1 their names in this second edition, who, being incensed against me with a furious hatred and fear, lest the majesty of kings do purchase some favor to my writings, do boast abroad that they did conceive sore displeasure, that their name was mixed with the doctrine of the sacraments which they themselves disallow. I leave it indifferent whether that be true or no, neither do I pass; F2 forasmuch as I did neither hunt after any private gain, nor yet seek to win favor. But because it seemed to me an indecent and filthy thing to enforce those books upon men which are unwilling to entertain them, which do find willing readers

enough, it was worth the declaring now, that I never did think any thing less; but that I did hope for more courtesy than I found. In that truly there can be no offense, if withdrawing myself from the contempt of those who loathe my dutifullness, I suffer them to enjoy those delights of theirs which they desire, and wherein they delight.

Of you, most famous prince, have I made choice, not without good cause, whom I might put in the place of two; both because I think you most worthy to have your name appear in the spiritual building of Christ's temple; neither do I fear but that my book shall find the same friendship at your hands, which you did vouchsafe to declare towards me in your most gentle letters. But, omitting at this time the respect of private good-will, I will stay in another thing. Moreover, I may full well apply unto you that speech which I had before with another. Neither am I determined in this place to commend those most excellent virtues wherewith you have purchased great authority and singular favor with the King F3 of Polonia; I am rather bent unto an exhortation, the sum whereof shall be this, that with the like readiness and joyfulness wherewith you have at the beginning received the pure doctrine of the Gospel, that with the like stoutness of courage wherewith you have hitherto endeavored to maintain the true worship of God, you do with the same constancy prosecute this course unto the end.

It was surely a point of rare virtue, that whereas you did know that many did hate nothing more than the frank profession and free study of godliness, yet, so soon as the truth of the Gospel of Christ did once shine and appear unto you, you did not fear by giving your name to provoke their hatred against you. Neither do those offices and good turns deserve small praise, which you did not cease to bestow upon the cherishing and increasing of the first beginnings of the Church; although this your diligence did purchase unto you great envy amongst many noblemen, which did not allow the same. But, because you have no less hard straits to pass through, you must oftentimes stir up and encourage yourself to overcome them all, until you have finished the last act; and, so much the more carefully, because many princes, although they see the estate of the Church filthily corrupt, yet dare they attempt no remedy; because that danger which they fear will proceed from innovation, when evils must be driven out of their old and quiet possession, doth hinder and keep them back from doing their duty. Other some think it to be an absurd and foolish thing to touch (or set hand to) diseases which are incurable. Other some (I cannot tell through what forwardness) do flee from and abhor all manner of reformation. But to intreat of those lets wherewith you are environed on every side, it were superfluous, especially seeing you know them well enough. Yet, howsoever Satan doth assault you, and with what combats soever he doth exercise you, you cannot, without great wickedness, be weary of this holy warfare, which you have professed under Christ his banner. Furthermore, although you be forward enough of yourself, yet I hope it will neither be troublesome, nor yet unprofitable for you, to have your prosperous course of your earnest study, holpen and furthered with this help which God doth offer unto your hands by me. F4

So often as we see things tossed to and fro, and, as it were, turned topsy-turvy in the world, there can no more fit and sure prop be found to establish and stay our weak consciences, than when as setting before our eyes the kingdom of Christ, as it doth now appear, we consider what hath been F5 the estate and condition of the same from the

beginning. When we speak of the kingdom of Christ, we must respect two things; the doctrine of the gospel, whereby Christ doth gather unto himself a church, and whereby he governeth the same, being gathered together; secondly, the society of the godly, who being coupled together by the sincere faith of the gospel, are truly accounted the people of God. Both which things, how lively they are expressed by Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, it is better to know by the reading of the whole book, than to believe either my commendation, or the commendation of any man else. For although the Son of God hath always reigned, even from the first beginning of the world, yet after that, being revealed in the flesh, he published his gospel, he began then to erect a more famous tribunal-seat than before, whence he doth now appear most plainly, and to be also most glorious. If we turn our eyes hither, they shall be fed, not with a vain picture, (as Virgil saith of his AEneas) but with the sound knowledge of those things from which we must fetch life. And to the end I may return unto that whereof I determined to speak, this is the best refuge for the conscience of men, where they may quietly rest amidst these troublesome tempests wherewith the world is shaken. Finally, this meditation alone shall bring to pass, that that shall never befall us, which too too many experiments do prove to have been truly spoken by Ennius in times past of the more part of men, that *wisdom is driven* away so often as the matter is handled by violence. For if, in the greatest and most vehement heat of combats, the sweet harmony of instruments was of such force amongst the Lacedemonians, that it did assuage that furiousness and fierceness which was engendered in that warlike people, and did temper that violence which doth then out of measure rage in those natures which are otherwise impatient, how much more shall the kingdom of Christ do this by the heavenly pleasant tune of the Holy Ghost, which doth not only tame most cruel beasts, but maketh also

lambs of wolves, lions, and bears; which turneth spears into hooks, and swords into ploughshares?

Therefore, seeing that, most noble prince, I offer unto you such kind of temperature as the necessity of times requireth, I hope that this duty of mine shall not be unwelcome to your highness; so that, indeed, you shall perceive this kind of confirmation to be very profitable and fit to look into the beginning of the Church, as it is described of Luke, wherein appeareth both wonderful power of God under the reproach of the cross, and also most valiant patience of the servants of God, under the huge burden of troubles, and the success itself incredible to the judgment of the world, bringeth forth most plentiful fruit of both. But that I may omit other things which you had better set [seek] out by reading of Luke himself, I will touch one thing which is proper to earthly princes, and the chief governors of kingdoms and countries; to wit, that seeing that (the power of the whole world gainsaying, and all men which were then in authority being armed to oppress the gospel) a few men, obscure, unarmed, and contemptible, trusting only to the aid of the truth and the Spirit, did labor so stoutly in spreading abroad the faith of Christ, did refuse no pains nor danger, did stand stoutly against all assaults, until at length they got the victory; there remaineth no excuse for Christian nobles, who are of any dignity, seeing God hath furnished them with the sword to defend the kingdom of his Son, unless they be at least as constant and bold to take upon them such an honorable office.

Furthermore, it is not my part to declare how faithfully and uprightly I have behaved myself in interpreting this history. I hope, surely, my labor shall be fruitful to all men. And as for you, most worthy prince, I must again request and beseech you, that you do both privately addict yourself

wholly unto Christ his government, as you have of late happily begun; and that you would also become not only a faithful helper, but also a most stout and valiant standardbearer in furthering the kingdom of Christ unto so many noble men, whom not only the renown of their stock and lineage, but also the excellency of their virtues, doth commend. God hath vouchsafed to bestow upon the realm of Polonia a singular privilege of honor, that the better part of the nobility, bidding adieu to wicked superstitions, which are as many corruptions and pollutions of the worship of God, should desire with one consent a true form of godliness, and a well framed and reformed order of the Church. It is well known that these men were not a little aided by your authority. But there remain more combats both for you and also for them, than that, like overworn F6 soldiers, you should give yourselves to idleness and rest.

First, although no foreign enemy trouble you, you shall have business enough to withstand those evils which are at home with you. You have sufficiently tried with how many sleights Satan is furnished, that he may work some policy to overthrow that holy concord amongst brethren, wherein consisteth the safety of the Church; that befalleth you which is common everywhere, for troublesome men to thrust in themselves when things are out of order; who, whilst they see a few, and those weaklings troubled by a great multitude, and that they do with much ado defend the truth, which is covered with the thick clouds of false accusations, they do more easily come upon them unawares F7 And by this subtlety doth that chief worker of all deceit and guile seek the ruin of the Church, not only by cutting, mangling, and pulling in pieces the unity of the faith, but by burdening the name of Christ with false envy; because the companies of the godly, amongst whom these wicked

knaves mix themselves, seem to be certain receptacles and sinks of all filthiness.

So, whilst that Stancarus, a man of a troublesome nature, doth, through that ambition wherewith he is wholly set on fire, spread abroad amongst you his dotings, hereupon brake out that contention which threateneth some scattering abroad; and you were laid open unto the slanders of many, because it was thought that his sect did spread itself farther. Behold, on the other side, a certain physician, called George Blandrata, worse than Stancarus, because his error is more detestable, and because he hath in his mind more secret poison. For which cause these also are the more worthy to be reproved, at whose hands the ungodliness of Servetus hath found such favor of such a sudden. For although I am persuaded that they are far from those perverse and sacrilegious opinions, yet they should have taken better heed, and not have suffered this fox craftily to creep into their company. Because such plagues will never be wanting, neither will Satan ever cease to bring abroad into the forefront such champions as have given over themselves to serve him, that he may trouble the beginnings of the gospel, it is for you to be continually in a readiness; and to the end you may prevent greater evils, you must set down right and godly manner of government, which is the faithful keeping of holy peace. For as it is manifest that purity of doctrine is the soul of the Church, so we may full well compare discipline unto the sinews, wherewith the body being bound and knit together, doth maintain his [its] strength.

Now, on the other side, the ungodliness of other enemies ought to sharpen your study (and earnestness,) I mean the preachers of Antichrist of Rome, who, to the end they may deceive the ignorant, do continually, with shrill voice, sound out the name of the Church. There is no controversy

amongst us about the Church, but all grant that the authority thereof ought to be reverenced of all the children of God; save only that they, under false color of honor, do make the shadowish name of the Church subject to their lusts; we do so reverence the Church from our heart, that we account it great wickedness to profane the sacred name thereof. That I may omit other godly ministers of pure and sound doctrine, I myself have again and again heretofore in many places handled this question. When mention is made of the Church, whose head is the Son of God, and which he, who is the fountain of life eternal, doth always quicken by his Spirit, how ridiculous a thing it is to bring forth a body without a head, and, secondly, a dead carcass.

The hireling flatterers of the Pope do cry out that they have the Church; but we can know by no means better, whether this be true or no, than when we look unto the head. As for that, it is manifest that it is cut off by their sacrilegious violence. For how shall Christ retain the place of the head, being despoiled of all his power, thrown down from his government, deprived of his dignity? Upon this condition hath the heavenly Father made him the head of the Church, that he may govern all men from the greatest to the least, by the doctrine of his gospel; that he may be the only priest to reconcile the Father continually, as he hath once appeased his wrath by the sacrifice of his death; that his death may continually purge our sins; that his blood may be the only washing; that his obedience may be a perfect satisfaction; that he may be a (continual and) sole intercessor, through whose means our prayers may be heard; that he may be a faithful defender and tutor, that he may, by his aid, defend us; that (the vices of our flesh being tamed) he may reform us unto righteousness and holiness; that he alone may begin and finish in us a blessed life. If the Papists have left him any of these things, let them have the Church on their side. But if the Pope, oppressing men's

consciences with his fierce and more cruel tyranny, have disannulled and taken away Christ his government; if he have brought in a form of government altogether contrary to the gospel; if he have invented a new and strange priesthood, that he may thrust-in himself, being but a mortal man, to be the mediator between God and the world; if he have forged daily sacrifices, that he may trot them in Christ's place; if he have invented a thousand satisfactions for sins; if he have brought reigned washings from the lake of hell, to make dry the blood of the Son of God; if he have put in his place infinite patrons; if he have torn in a thousand pieces that righteousness which must be set [sought] wholly from him; if, instead of the Holy Ghost, he have erected man's free-will; it is, without all question, that the true Christ is banished far from Papistry. For this cause have I said that the Papists make boast of a dead carcass instead of the lively body of Christ, because, though they have extinguished the doctrine of the gospel, (which is the true soul of the Church, and which duly doth quicken the same,) yet they do greatly boast of a shadowish and trifling kind of Church.

We make it full well known how corrupt the purity of doctrine is amongst them, yea, with what monstrous errors it is polluted. They do not only cover all their corruptions under the shadow of the Church, but also complain that we do great injury to the Church, because we say that the same doth err. But they should first have examined the doctrine, that the Church might thereby be known. These just and honest judges will have the reigned title of doctrine to have sufficient force of prejudice to cover and suppress the difference, and that not to deceive men. For with what sleights and legerdemain would they assay to blear even dazzling eyes in so great light? But because they account this liberty of lying a part of their tyranny, they

think they reign not as they would, unless they reproachfully mock miserable souls.

That we may set an example no farther, we have seen in our times, sometimes the Tridentine Fathers, sometimes the Fathers of Bononia, who, although they were even at daggers drawing among themselves, yet did they foam out their vain canons on both sides. And surely if men assent to their principles, the triumph shall be prepared on both sides. There sit there I cannot tell how many bishops and abbots, peradventure an hundred horned beasts. If the most fine flower of all the nation should shine there, yet should it be nothing else but a wicked conspiracy against God. And now after that the Pope hath gathered together the bran and chips of his unclean and filthy rotten flock, shall the representative Church suddenly appear there? And are they not yet ashamed to call that an holy, general, and lawful Council, which doth not deserve so much as to be called a vain and comical visor of a Council? But as for us, to whom the promise is made, that Antichrist, who sitteth in the temple of God, shall be destroyed with the breath of the Lord's mouth; let not us (I say) cease to refute this filthy and whorish impudency, with that most sacred word which they so boldly mock, that all men may see what difference there is between the chaste spouse of Christ and the stinking whore of Belial; between the sanctuary of God and the brothel-house of Satan; between the spiritual house of the godly and the stye of hogs; and, finally, between the true Church and the court of Rome. There can no more certain or plain demonstration be brought concerning this matter either by Euclid, either yet by Archimedes, than if the Church, as Luke describeth it, be compared with the Popish synagogue. Neither am I so strait that I would have that confused lump, being altogether repugnant unto the order of nature and manner of humanity, to be agreeable in all points to the rule of the Apostles, which is angelical and

heavenly. If they can show any thing wherein they are like unto them, ^{F8} they may triumph for me; but forasmuch as all things are contrary, and although the more part of men become blind willingly, at least wise, [still] seeing the whole heavens do allow ^{F9} us, we may not only contemn their brain-sick pride without any fear, but also freely speak evil of the same.

In the mean season, we have no small consolation to support us, that howsoever the Papists do set against us with stern countenance F10 the name and title of the Church, yet we know that we fight only against the professed enemies of Christ. We ought above all things to desire, that the most renowned king, who, according to his wisdom, hath long ago spied out the subtle sleights of the Romish court, commanding those vain bulls to avoid, F11 wherein the council boasteth afar off, may at length more freely apply his mind unto the earnest and perfect restoring of the Church; yet ought no lingering to keep you back, but every one of you must, with might and main, endeavor to enlarge and spread abroad those beginnings which are begun to arise so happily.

Farewell, most excellent lord and right renowned prince. The Lord always govern you with his Spirit, amplify by all means your dignity, and bless your godly enterprises even unto the end.

At Geneva, the 1st of August, 1560.

THE ARGUMENT UPON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.