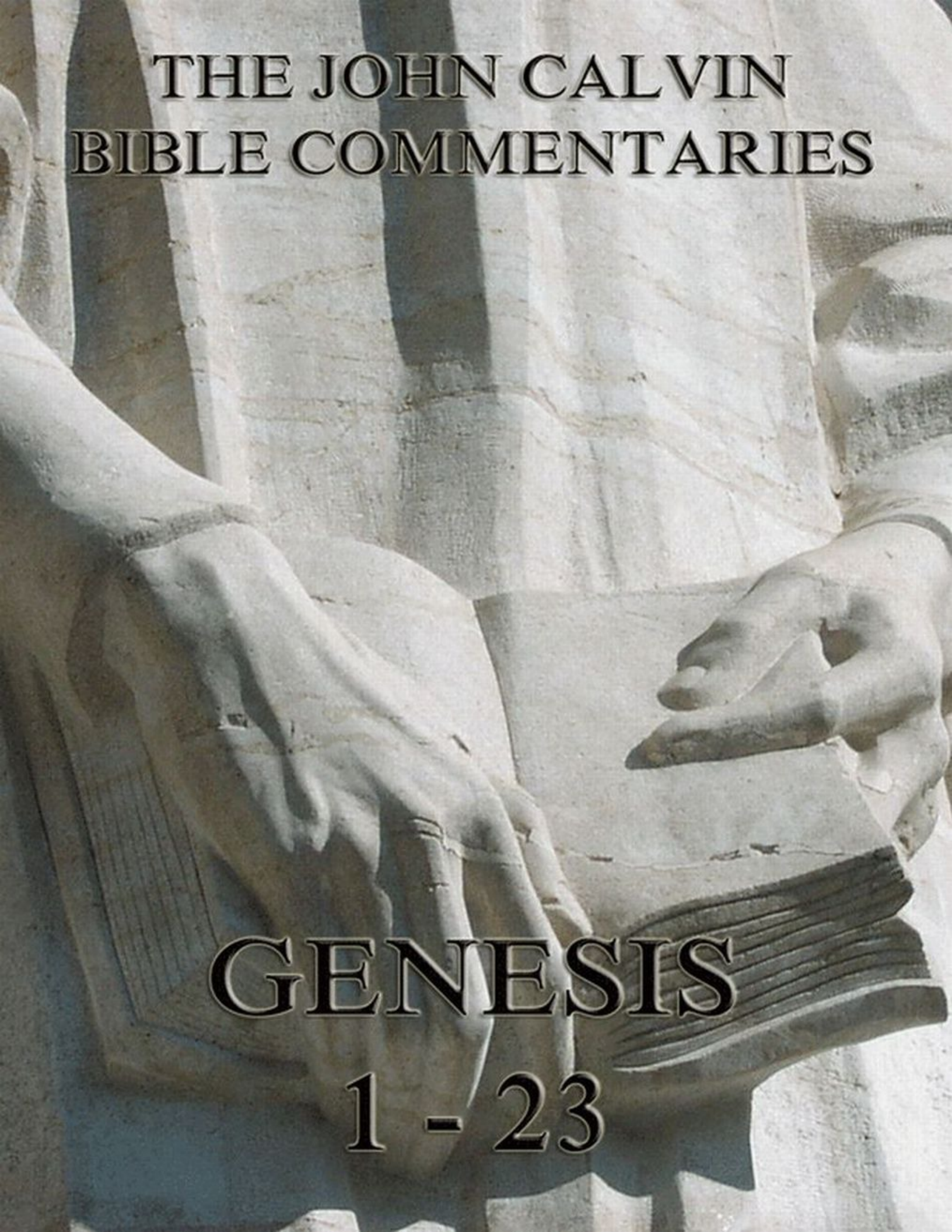

THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

GENESIS

1 - 23

Commentaries On Genesis 1-23

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'Eveque 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 Doumergue 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 educatlon 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 Noyon, 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 yoke 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.

COMMENTARIES ON GENESIS 1-23

Translator's Preface

Several of the Commentaries of Calvin on different portions of the Holy Scripture having been for some time before the public, through the labors of The Calvin Society; it is not improbable that the readers of the following pages will have already become in a great degree familiar with the writings of this celebrated Reformer.

It may, perhaps, therefore be thought an unnecessary, if not a presumptuous undertaking, to preface the present work with any general observations on the character of Calvin's Expository Writings. But though the Commentary on Genesis was neither the first which Calvin wrote, nor the first which the Calvin Society has republished; yet since, in the ultimate arrangement of the Commentaries it must take the foremost place, the Editor has determined to offer such preliminary remarks as may seem desirable for a reader who begins to read the Commentaries of Calvin, as he begins to read the Bible itself, at the Book of Genesis. If, in taking such a course, he is charged with repeating some things which have been said by others before him, he will not be extremely anxious either to defend himself from the charge or to meet it with a denial.

It seems to be now generally admitted that though, in the brilliant constellation formed by the master-spirits of the Reformation, there were those who, in some respects, shone with brighter lustre than Calvin, yet, as a Commentator on Holy Scripture, he far outshines them all.

There is scarcely anything in which the wisdom of God has been more conspicuous, than in his choice of instruments for carrying into execution the different parts of that

mighty revolution of sentiment, which affected, more or less, every portion of Europe during the sixteenth century.

Long before the issue of the movement was seen or apprehended, we behold Erasmus, the most accomplished scholar of the age, acting unconsciously as the pioneer of a Reformation, which at length he not only opposed, but apparently hated. He had been raised up by God to lash the vices of the Clergy, to expose the ignorance, venality, and sloth of the Mendicant Orders, and to exhibit the follies of Romanism in sarcastic invectives rendered imperishable by the elegant Latinity in which they were clothed. But he did still more. The world is indebted to him for the first edition of the entire New Testament in the Original Greek. [F1] He had also the honor of being the first modern translator of the New Testament into Latin. [F2] He published a valuable critical Commentary on the New Testament, which was early translated into English, and ordered to be placed in the Churches. [F3] Yet, great as the service undoubtedly was which he rendered to the cause of truth, he never dared to cast the yoke of Rome from his own neck, never stooped to identify himself with the Protestant Reformers; but lived and died, as there is reason to fear, a mean, trickling, timeserving Romanist, panting for preferment in a Church, the unsoundness of which he had so fearfully exposed. It is not, however, to be denied that God employed him as a most important instrument in shaking the foundations of the Papacy, and in preparing the way for the more successful efforts of more sincere and devoted servants of God.

Among these Luther and Melancthon in one field, Calvin and Zuinglius in another, occupy posts of the greatest responsibility and usefulness; but Luther and Calvin are manifestly the great leaders in this cause.

In qualifications necessary for the commencing of this great struggle, we readily yield the palm to Luther. His indomitable energy, his noble bearing, his contempt for danger, his transparent honesty of purpose, his fiery zeal, his generous frankness — though too often degenerating into peremptory vehemence of spirit and rudeness of manner — eminently fitted him to take the lead in a warfare where so much was to be braved, to be endured, and to be accomplished.

There was still another qualification, which perhaps no man ever possessed in so high a degree as the Saxon Reformer, and that consisted in the prodigious mastery he had over his own mother-tongue. He seized on the rude, yet nervous and copious German of his ancestors, and taught it to speak with a combination of melody and force, which it had never known before. And his vernacular translation of the Holy Scriptures, in opening to the millions of the German empire the Fount of eternal life, also revealed to them the hitherto hidden beauties and powers of their own masculine tongue.

Calvin, like Luther, was a man of courage; but he wanted Luther's fire, he wanted Luther's ardent frankness of disposition; he wanted, in short, the faculty which Luther possessed in a preeminent degree, of laying hold on the affections, and of kindling the enthusiasm of a mighty nation.

Calvin, like Luther too, was a Translator of the Scriptures, and it is worthy of remark, that he also wrote in a far purer and better style than any of his contemporaries, or than any writers of an age near his own. But he had not the honor, which God conferred on Luther, of sending forth the sacred volume as a wholes through that great nation in

which his language was spoken, and of thus pouring, by one single acts a flood of light upon millions of his countrymen.

But whatever advantage may lie on the side of Luther in the comparison, so far as it has yet been carried, we shall find it on the side of Calvin in grasp of intellect, in discriminating power, in calmness, clearness and force of argument, in patience of research, in solid learning, in every quality, in short, which is essential to an Expositor of Holy Writ. We are the better able to institute this comparison, because Luther himself wrote a Commentary on the Scriptures; but the slightest inspection of the two Commentaries will convince the Reader of Calvin's intellectual superiority; and will show, that as a faithful, penetrating, and judicious expounder of the Holy Spirit's meaning in the Scriptures, he left the great Leader of the Reformation at an immeasurable distance behind. [F4]

The doctrinal system of Calvin is too well known to require explanation in this place. It is, however, a mistake to suppose that, on those points in which Calvinism is deemed peculiarly to consist, he went a single step farther than Luther himself, and the great majority of the Reformers. He states his views with calmness, clearness and precision; he reasons on them dispassionately, and never shrinks from any consequences to which he perceives them to lead. But it would be the height of injustice to charge him with obtruding them at every turn upon his reader, or with attempting to force the language of Scripture to bear testimony to his own views.

No writer ever dealt more fairly and honestly by the Word of God. He is scrupulously careful to let it speak for itself, and to guard against every tendency of his own mind to put

upon it a questionable meaning for the sake of establishing some doctrine which he feels to be important, or some theory which he is anxious to uphold. This is one of his prime excellencies. He will not maintain any doctrine, however orthodox and essential, by a text of Scripture which to him appears of doubtful application, or of inadequate force. For instance, firmly as he believed the doctrine of the Trinity, he refuses to derive an argument in its favor, from the plural form of the name of God in the first chapter of Genesis. It were easy to multiply examples of this kinds which, whether we agree in his conclusions or not, cannot fail to produce the conviction, that he is, at least, an honest Commentator, and will not make any passage of Scripture speak more or less than, according to his view, its Divine Author intended it to speak. Calvin has been charged with ignorance of the language in which the Old Testament was written. Father Simon says that he scarcely knew more of Hebrew than the letters! The charge is malicious and ill founded. It may, however, be allowed that a critical examination of the text of Holy Scripture was not the end which Calvin proposed to himself; nor had he perhaps the materials or the time necessary for that accurate investigation of word and syllables to which the Scriptures have more recently been subjected. Still his verbal criticisms are neither few nor unimportant, though he lays comparatively little stress upon them himself. [F5]

His great strength, however, is seen in the clear, comprehensive view he takes of the subject before him, in the facility with which he penetrates the meaning of his Author, in the lucid expression he gives to that meaning, in the variety of new yet solid and profitable thoughts which he frequently elicits from what are apparently the least promising portions of the sacred text, in the admirable precision with which he unfolds every doctrine of Holy

Scripture, whether veiled under figures and types, or implied in prophetical allusions, or asserted in the records of the Gospel. As his own mind was completely imbued with the whole system of divine truth, and as his capacious memory never seemed to lose anything which it had once apprehended, he was always able to present a harmonized and consistent view of truth to his readers, and to show the relative position in which any given portion of it stood to all the rest. This has given a completeness and symmetry to his Commentaries which could scarcely have been looked for; as they were not composed in the order in which the Sacred Books stand in the Volume of Inspiration, nor perhaps in any order of which a clear account can now be given. He probably did not, at first, design to expound more than a single Book; and was led onwards by the course which his Expository Lectures in public took, to write first on one and then on another, till at length he traversed nearly the whole field of revealed truth.

That, in proceeding with such want of method, his work, instead of degenerating into a congeries of lax and unconnected observations constantly reiterated, should have maintained, to a great degree, the consistency of a regular and consecutive Commentary, is mainly to be imputed to the gigantic intellectual power by which he was distinguished. Through the whole of his writings, this power is everywhere visible, always in action, ingrafting upon every passing incident some forcible remark, which the reader no sooner sees than he wonders that it had not occurred to his own mind. A work so rich in thought is calculated to call into vigorous exercise the intellect of the reader; and, what is the best and highest use of reading, to compel him to think for himself. It is like seed-corn, the parent of the harvest.

It has been objected against Calvin by Bishop Horsley, — no mean authority in Biblical criticism, — that "by his want of taste, and by the poverty of his imagination, he was a most wretched Expositor of the Prophecies, — just as he would have been a wretched expositor of any secular poet." [F6] It is true, this censure is qualified by the acknowledgment that Calvin was "a man of great piety, great talents, and great learning." Yet, after all, it would not, perhaps, be difficult to show that, as an expounder of the poetical portions of Holy Scripture, — the Psalms for instance, — Bishop Horsley more frequently errs through an excess of imagination, than Calvin does through the want of it. However this may be, it is not intended here to assert, either that Calvin possessed a high degree of poetical taste, or that he cultivated to any great extent the powers of the imagination. His mind was cast in the more severe mould of chastised, vigorous, and concentrated thought. They who seek for the flowers of poesy must go to some other master; they who would acquire habits of sustained intellectual exercise may spend their days and nights over the pages of Calvin.

But that which gives the greatest charm to these noble compositions is the genuine spirit of piety which breathes through them. The mind of the writer turns with ease and with obvious delight to the spiritual application of his subject. Hence the heart of the reader is often imperceptibly raised to high and heavenly things. The rare combination of intellect so profound and reasoning so acute, with piety so fervent, inspires the reader with a calm and elevated solemnity, and strengthens his conviction of the excellence and dignity of true religion.

On the mode in which The Editor has executed his task he may be permitted to say, that he has attempted to be

faithful as a translator, without binding himself to a servile rendering of word for word, unmindful of the idiomatic differences between one language and another. Yet it has been his determination not to sacrifice sense to sound, nor to depart from the Author's meaning for the sake of giving to any sentence a turn which might seem more agreeable to an English ear. He has occasionally softened an expression which appeared harsh in the original, and would appear harsher still in our own language and in our own times. But in such cases, he has generally placed the Latin expression before the reader in a note. He has done the same, when any sentence appeared capable of a different interpretation from that which is given in the translation. A few passages which justly offend against delicacy are left untranslated; and one it has been thought expedient entirely to omit. Some remarks are, however, made upon it in the proper place.

Clear as the Latin Style of Calvin generally is, yet his sententious mode of expressing himself occasionally leaves some ambiguity in his expressions. Such difficulties, however, have generally been overcome by the aid of the valuable French Translation, published at Geneva in the year 1564, — the year of Calvin's death, — of which there is no reason to doubt that Calvin was the author. Frequent references to this translation in the notes will show to what extent assistance has been derived from it by the Editor.

An English Translation of this Commentary on Genesis, by Thomas Tymme, in black letter, was printed in the year 1578. It is, upon the whole, fairly executed; but nearly every criticism on Hebrew words is entirely passed over; and where the Translator has not had the sagacity to omit the whole of any such passage, he has betrayed his own ignorance of the language, and obscured the meaning of his author. Tymme claims for Calvin the credit of being the

first foreign Protestant Commentator on Genesis who was made to speak in the English language. [F7]

The reader will find Calvin's Latin Version of the sacred text placed side by side with our own excellent Authorised Translation. [F8] This was thought the best method of meeting the wants of the public. The learned may see Calvin's own words, which they will much prefer to any translation of them, however accurate; the unlearned will have before them that version of the Scriptures which from their youth they have been taught to reverence. Where Calvin's version materially differs from our own, and especially where his comments are made on any such different rendering, ample explanation is given in the notes.

The Editor may be expected to say something respecting the notes generally, which he has ventured to append to this Commentary. Some may object that they are too few, others that they are superfluous. It would have been easy to have made them more numerous, had space permitted; and easier still to have omitted them altogether. But the writer of them thought it would hardly be doing justice to Calvin to leave everything exactly as he found it; for were the distinguished Author of the Commentary now alive to re-edit his own immortal work, there is no doubt that he would reject every error which the increased facilities for criticism would have enabled him to detect, and that he would throw fresh light on many topics which were, in his day, dimly seen, or quite misunderstood. And though it belongs not to an Editor to alter what is erroneous, or to incorporate in his Author's Work any thoughts of his own, or of other men; yet it is not beyond his province, — provided he does it with becoming modesty, and with adequate information, — to point out mistakes, to suggest

such considerations as may have led him to conclusions different from those of his Author, and to quote from other Writers' passages, sometimes confirmatory of, sometimes adverse to, those advanced in the Work which he presents to the public. Within these limits the Editor has endeavored to confine himself. How far he has succeeded, it is not for him but for the candid and competent reader to determine.

As it was possible that a doubt might exist whether the version of Scripture used by Calvin was his own, or whether he had borrowed it from some other source; it was thought worth the labor to investigate the true state of the case, by having recourse to the excellent Library of the British Museum. For this purpose the several versions which Calvin was most likely to have adopted, had he not made one for himself, were subjected to examination. It was not necessary to refer to any made by Romanists; and those made by Protestants into the Latin language, which there was any probability he should use, were but two. One by Sebastian Munster, printed at Basle with the Hebrew Text, in 1534, from which the version of Calvin varies considerably; the other by Leo Juda and other learned men, printed at Zurich in 1543, and afterwards reprinted by Robert Stephens in 1545 and 1557. The last of these editions was made use of in comparing the versions of Leo Juda and Calvin; and though there certainly are differences, yet they are so slight as to leave the impression that Calvin took that of Leo Juda as his basis, and only altered it as he saw occasion. To give the reader, however, the opportunity of judging for himself, a few verses of the first chapter of Genesis are transcribed from each.

Genesis 1:1-6

Version of Leo Juda **1.** In principio creavit Deus coelum et terram. Version of John Calvin **1.** In principio creavit Deus coelum et terram.

2. Terra autem erat desolate et inanis, tenebraeque erant in superficie voraginis: et Spiritus Dei agitabat sese in superficie aquarum. **2.** Terra autem erat informis et inanis, tenebraeque erant in superficie voraginis: et Spiritus Dei agitabat se in superficie aquarum.

3. Dixitque Deus, Sit Lux, et fuit lux. **3.** Et dixit Deus, Sit Lux, et fuit lux.

4. Viditque Deus lucem quod esset bona, et divisit Deus lucem a tenebris. **4.** Viditque Deus lucem quod bona esset, et divisit Deus lucem a tenebris.

5. Vocavitque Deus lucem Diem, et tenebras vocavit Noctem; fuitque vespera, et fuit mane dies unus. **5.** Et vocavit Deus lucem Diem, et tenebras vocavit Noctem. Fuitque vespera, et fuit mane dies primus.

6. Dixit quoque Deus, Sit expansio, etc. **6.** Et dixit Deus, Sit extensio, etc.

A similar examination was next resorted to, for the purpose of ascertaining the source of Calvin's French Version. The first printed version of the Scriptures into French was from the pen of Jacques Le Fevre d'Estaples; or, as he was more commonly called, Jacobus Faber Stapulensis. It was printed at Antwerp, by Martin L'Empereur. Though its author was in communion with the Church of Rome, yet the version is "said to be the basis of all subsequent French Bibles, whether executed by Romanists or Protestants." [F9]

The first Protestant French Bible was published by Robert Peter Olivetan, with the assistance of his relative, the illustrious John Calvin, who corrected the Antwerp edition wherever it differed from the Hebrew. [F10] It might have been expected that Calvin would have placed this version — made under his own eye, and perfected by his own assistance without alteration at the head of his

Commentaries. But it appears that he has not done so, for though he departs but little from it, he not unfrequently alters a word or two in the translation.

While on the subject of Versions, it may be added, that in The Old English Translation by Tymme already alluded to, The Geneva Version is used. This translation was made by the learned exiles from England during the Marian Persecution, and is sometimes distinguished from others by the name of The Breeches Bible, on account of the rendering of Genesis 3:7. [F11]

To give the reader some notion of the order in which Calvin's Commentaries succeeded each other, the following List, with the dates appended, taken from Senebier's Literary History of Geneva, is submitted to his consideration:

Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans **1540**

Commentary on all the Epistles of Paul [F12] **1548**

Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the Epistles of Peter,

John, Jude, and James **1551**

Commentary on Isaiah **1551**

Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles **1552**

Commentary on Genesis **1554**

Commentary on the Psalms **1557**

Commentary on Hosea **1557**

Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets **1559**

Commentary on Daniel **1561**

Commentary on Joshua [F13] **1562**

Harmony of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy **1563**

Commentary on Jeremiah **1563**

Harmony of Three Gospels and Commentary on St John. [F14] **1563**

A *facsimile* of the title-page of the French Translation of 1563, and of the Dedication to the Duke of Vendome, as a specimen of the French style and spelling of the age, and a further *facsimile* of the title-page of the English Translation of 1578, as well as of the Dedication to the Earl of Warwick by Thomas Tymme, prefixed to the latter, will be found in this edition. An accurate copy of the Map, roughly sketched by Calvin, for the purpose of explaining his hypothesis respecting the situation of the Garden of Eden, and which seems to have been the basis of the most approved theories on the subjects will be found in its proper place. The same Map is given in the French and English translations, and also in the Latin edition of Professor Hengstenberg, published at Berlin in the year 1838. It may be observed, as a coincidence, that the same sketch appears in the Anglo — Geneva Bible, to which reference has been made. A more elaborate Map accompanies the Amsterdam edition of Calvin's Works, published in 1671.

The edition now issuing from the press is also enriched by an engraving, in the first style of art, of facsimiles of various medals of Calvin never before submitted to the British public.

Hull, January 1, 1847

TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE, MY VERIE GOOD LORDE AMBROSE, EARLE OF WARWICKE, BARON LISLE, MAISTER OF HER MAIESTIE'S ORDINANCE, KNIGHT OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER AND ONE OF HER HIGHNESSE PRIUIE COUNSELL, AND TO THE RIGHT HONORABLE LADIE HIS WIFE, ENCREASE OF HONOUR, AND TRUE KNOWLEDGE IN CHRIST lESVS.

If the Apostle Paule (right honorable) condemne the negligence of men, because they behold not the euident spectacle of the glorie of God which is set before their eyes in the workemanship of the worlde,by which they wickedly suppresse the light of trueth: no lesse foule and shameful was that ignorance of the original and creation of mankind which almost in euery age and time so greatly preuailed.

The which ignorance immediately ensued. the building of Babylon by the forgetting of those things which ought to haue beene dayly and howerly spoken off. For at what time godlesse men were banishcd from their natiue soile and dispersed, they therewithall abandoned the pure worship of God: Insomuch that to what part of' the earth so euer they came, they had no care to bring with them that which they had heard of their forefathers, concerning the creating and repairing of the worlde. And so it came to passe, that no nation, except only the posteritie of Abraham, knew by the space of two thousand yeares, either from whence or when mankind had his originall. As for the labour which Ptolome bestowed in translating the books of. Moses into the Greeke tongue, it was at that time more laudable than fruitful: when as the light which he went about to bring out of darknes, was neuerthelesse through the carelesnesse of men extinguished. Whereby wee may perceiue, that they which ought to haue endeuored themselues, to knowe the workemaister of the worlde, sought rather by their vngod-linesse howe they might be wilfully blinde and ignorant. In the meane time the liberal Sciences florished, men's witts were sharpe and quicke, greate paines euery way was taken: and yet nothing was spoken of the creation of the worlde. Aristotle, the prince of philosophers, dreamed of the eternitie of the world. Plato, his schoolmaister, shooting somewhat more neere vnto the marke, wandered notwithstanding somewhat from the trueth. But whether they, and all other nations with them, were wilfully blinde, or whether they were ignorant through their owne negligence, this booke of Moses deserueth to be esteemed as a most precious iewell, which certifieth vs not only of the creation of the worlde, but also howe, after the mortall fall of man, God adopted a Church to him selfe: which was the true worship of him, and with what exercises of godlinesse the fathers occupied them selues: howe pure religion, through the wicked negligence of men, was for a time