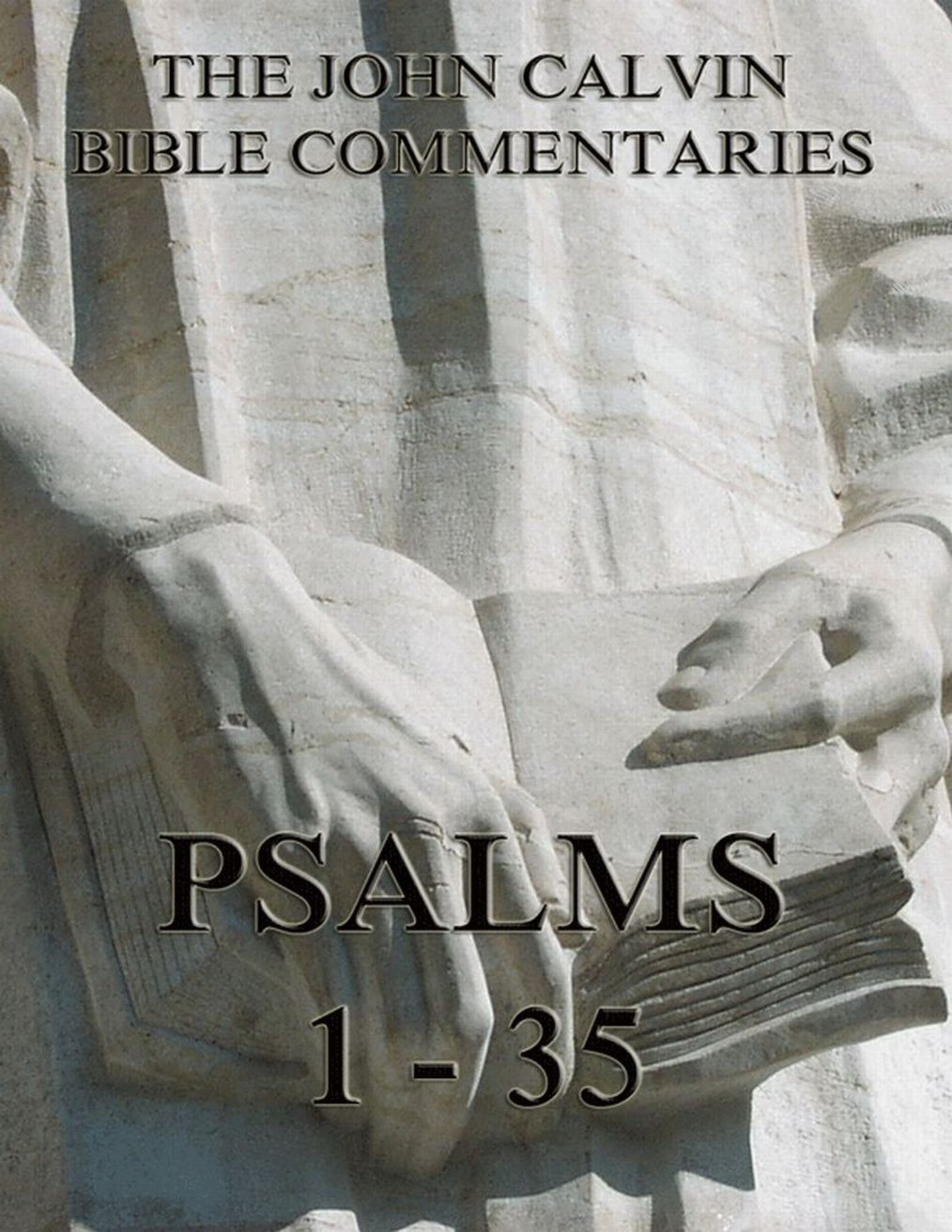

THE JOHN CALVIN BIBLE COMMENTARIES

PSALMS 1 - 35

Commentaries On The Psalms 1 - 35

John Calvin

Contents:

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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.

INTRODUCTORY NOTICE

The Book Of Psalms, viewed merely as a poetical composition, has very high claims on our attention. Men of the most refined and cultivated taste have often been attracted to the study of it from the poetical beauties with which it abounds, and have admitted, in this respect, the superiority of its claims. The greatest of our English poets [fa1] thus speaks of these sacred songs:"Not in their divine argument alone, but in the very critical art of composition, they may be easily made appear over all the kinds of lyric poesy to be incomparable." Another elegant scholar [fa2] speaking on the same subject, says, "In lyric flow and fire, in crushing force and majesty, that seems still to echo the awful sounds once heard beneath the thunder clouds of Sinai, the poetry of the ancient Scriptures is the most superb that ever burned within the breast of man."

But the intrinsic excellence of this Book gives it still higher claims on our attention. written under the influence of the Spirit of inspiration, its subject-matter is worthy of its celestial origin. In general, it contains details of the national history of the Jewish people, records of particular portions of the life and experience of individuals, and predictions of future events. Each of these heads embraces a wide field, and they include illustrations of every religions truth which it is necessary for us to know, exemplifications of every devout feeling which it is our duty to cherish, and examples of every spiritual conflict which it is possible for us to experience. We meet with many disclosures of the greatness, majesty, and perfections of the only true God; his government of the world; and his special care over his chosen people. We meet with the varied exercises of the regenerated soul, and behold it at one time offering up fervent supplications to the Hearer of prayer, at another celebrating his perfections and works; at one time giving utterance to the ardent breathings of love to God, and trust in him, at another struggling with unbelief and corruption; at one time mourning under the divine chastisement on account of sin, at another rejoicing in a sense of forgiving mercy, and enjoying the peace which passeth all understanding. We have presented to us many wonderful predictions concerning the Messiah, his humiliation, sufferings, death, resurrection, and ascension to his Fatherright hand; his work in heaven as the intercessor of his people, and his authority as universal King; the effusion of the influences of the Holy Spirit, and the conversion of all nations to the faith of the Gospel. In short, we have unfolded to our view the final judgment, the gathering of all the righteous to God, and the eternal exclusion of the wicked from happiness and from hope.

These and similar topics which are set forth in the noblest strains of poetry, and in a diction whose magnificence and

sublimity correspond to the importance and grandeur of the sentiments, constitute the materials of this Book; and while they afford an incontestable proof that it Is inspired, that it does not consist of the creations of mere human genius, but is an emanation from heaven, they show that its character and tendency are altogether different from the character and tendency of the most admired poetry, which the genius of heathen nations has ever produced. It ministers to no depraved passion; it fosters no fictitious virtue; it disdains to offer its delicious incense at the shrine of degrading superstition. It teaches the most exalted piety, and the purest morality. It tends only to refine and exalt the nature of man, to elevate the soul to God, and inspire it with the admiration and love of his character, to curb the passions, purify the affections, and excite to the cultivation of whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. It has guided the saint in doubt and difficulty; it has nerved him for self-denial and suffering; it has imparted support and comfort to him in the hour of death. This Book has accordingly been highly appreciated by the best of men in every age, and they have labored to find expressions in which to set forth its excellence. Athanasius styles it, "An epitome of the whole Scriptures;" Basil, "A compendium of all theology;" Luther, "A little Bible, and the summary of the Old Testament;" Melancthon, "The most elegant work extant in the world;" and for Calvin's estimate of its value we refer to the excellent preface with which he introduces this department of his labors to the attention of the reader.

Calvin's Commentary On The Psalms, a new Translation of which is now in course of being presented to the English reader, is distinguished by many of the excellencies which have acquired for his Commentaries on other parts of Scripture so great reputation. In this, as in his other Commentaries, his first and great object is to ascertain the

mind of the Holy Spirit. To ascertain this, he proceeds on the principle laid down by Melancthon, "that Scripture cannot be understood theologically, unless it be first understood grammatically." Before his time the mystical and allegorical method of explaining the Scriptures was very prevalent; according to which, the interpreter, dwelling very little or not at all upon the literal sense, sought for hidden and allegorical meanings. But rejecting this mode of interpretation, which contributed little to the right understanding of the word of God, and according to which the meaning was made to depend entirely upon the fancy of the interpreter, Calvin set himself to the investigation of the grammatical and literal sense, by a careful examination of the Hebrew test, and by a diligent attention to the drift and intention of the writer's discourse.

This principle of interpretation cannot be too highly commended. It should first engage the attention of the commentator; and when it is neglected, the fundamental principle of sacred criticism is violated. Calvin was deeply alive to its importance. His only defect lies in his acting upon it too exclusively. Many of the Psalms, in addition to the literal meaning, have a prophetical, evangelical, and spiritual sense. While referring primarily to David and the nation of Israel, they have, at the same time, a reference to Christ and the New Testament Church, founded on the fact that the former were typical of the latter. Calvin, indeed, explains some of the Psalms on this principle. But he applies the principle less frequently than he might have done, without contravening the canons of sound hermeneutics. His great aversion to the mystical method of interpretation, and to the absurd and extravagant lengths to which it was carried by the Fathers, perhaps made him err on the other extreme of confining his attention too much to the literal meanings and directing his attention too little to the prophetical and spiritual character of the Book,

and to the reference which it has to Christ and the Church. In consequence of this, his expositions have less unction, and contain less of rich evangelical sentiment, than would otherwise have distinguished them. There are, however, two principles of evangelical truth which he is at pains to inculcates whenever a fit opportunity presents itself —the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ without the works of the Law; and the necessity of personal holiness in order to salvation.

Another excellence of this commentary is its practical character. The author does not confine himself to the dry and lifeless detail of mere grammatical praxis, as if he had been commenting on a Greek or Roman classic. He turns all his explanations to practical account, and thus his work exhibits a happy combination of critical and philological remark with practical exposition.

Here, again, we find displayed the sound and penetrating judgment for which Calvin has been universally admired. This is manifest in the judicious selection which he makes from amongst a variety of interpretations of that which is evidently the true one, or which appears to be the most probable. Sometimes he pronounces a certain interpretation to be meagre and unsatisfactory. At other times, he simply states hit preference of one interpretation to another, when, after careful examinations it appeared to him to have the balance of arguments in its favor; without, however, expressing any decided opposition to the other, when the view which he preferred to it was supported only bit a slight preponderance of evidence. At other times, he does not decide between different interpretations, showing that with respect to certain words and expressions he had not come to a fixed opinion. In all these instances, [fa3] he generally shows much penetration and judgment. He is, no

doubt, sometimes mistaken in his interpretation of particular passages. But when it is considered that the Scriptures had long been a sealed book, and that his helps were few and imperfect compared with those which we now possess, the wonder is, that he should have succeeded so well in bringing out their true meaning. This was chiefly owing to vigor and acuteness of intellects combined with a sound and discriminating judgment. These, indeed, were the mental qualities by which he was peculiarly distinguished. We meet with no flashes of poetry, no brilliant coruscation of fancy, giving evidence of a powerful imagination. The eloquent passages which occur are the eloquence of reason, not the bursts of imagination. But his strength of thought, the vigor and perspicacity of his intellect, the extraordinary power of his judgment, command our willing admiration.

Since this commentary was first published, a great number of Translations of The Psalms, as well as numerous critical and explanatory works upon them, have made their appearance, while much new light has been thrown upon many passages from more extensive philological research, from an attention to the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, [fa4] and from the fuller information which we now possess, by the discoveries of modern travelers, of the natural history, customs, and mannered of the East, to which frequent allusion is made in The Psalms. But such id the acuteness of judgment, and success in discovering the mind of the Spirit which distinguish these prelections, that they are not superseded by any modern Commentary on the same subject:and though it is nearly three centuries since they were written, there are few separate works on The Psalms from which the student of the present day, who wishes critically to examine them, will derive more important assistance.

Nor is Calvin's impartiality and integrity as an interpreter less apparent in this Work than his judgment. It being his first and leading object to ascertain the mind of the Holy Spirit, he came to the Word of God not for the purpose of finding arguments to establish some preconceived opinion or theory, but in the humble character of a learner, and we never find him perverting or twisting a passage to support even those doctrines which he most deeply cherished. So far from doing this, he not infrequently gives up a text which has been explained by other commentators as a proof of some important doctrine, and which he would have viewed in the same light had it not been for his aversion to put on Scripture a forced construction, and his determination rigidly to adhere to the principles of fair and logical interpretation. For example, these words in Psalm 2:7,

> "Jehovah hath said unto me,
>
> Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee,"

have been quoted by Augustine and many other eminent divines, in proof of the eternal generation of the Son of God. But as Paul, in Acts 13:33, explains them as receiving their fulfillment in the resurrection of Christ, Calvin sets them aside from the class of proofs which support the doctrine of an eternal generation, although he held that doctrine, [fa5] and considers them as referring merely to the manifestation afforded of Christ's Sonship by his resurrection from the dead. [fa6] Again, Psalm 8:5, etc.,

> "Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and hast crowned him with glory and honor," etc.,

has been often explained as prophetic of the temporary humiliation and subsequent exaltation of Christ, an opinion which is supported by reasons far from contemptible; but Calvin, judging from the scope of the passage, considers it as exclusively referring to man, and that when Paul quotes it in Hebrews 2:7, and applies it to Christ, he applies it to him only by way of accommodation. [fa7] Again, these words in Psalm 33:6,

> "By the word of Jehovah were the heavens established,
> and all the host of them by the spirit of his mouth,"

have been viewed by many judicious divines as a proof of the Trinity, "Jehovah," denoting the Father, "the word of Jehovah," the Son, and "the spirit of Jehovah's mouth," the Holy Spirit; but while Calvin admits that the "word of Jehovah" means the Eternal Word, the only begotten Son of God, yet reasoning from the sense which the phrase, "the spirit of Jehovah's mouth," ordinarily bears in Scripture, he argues that it does not there mean the third person of the adorable Trinity, but simply *sermo, speech,* although there were no truths which he held more firmly, and regarded as more essential to the Christian system, than the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit. [fa8] "It is very possible," says Tholuck, "that in following this direction of mind, he may have unnecessarily sacrificed this and the other proof text; still the principle upon which he proceeded is in all cases to be approved." This commentary, again, bears evident marks of the learning of its author. His intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew language, the knowledge of which is of so much importance to the interpretation of the Old Testament Scriptures, is everywhere apparent. Father Simon, whom the acrimony of controversy led to indulge too much in depreciating and abusing those who differed from him, asserts, indeed, that

Calvin was so ignorant of the Hebrew language, that he knew nothing more than the letters. But we have only to examine his Commentary on The Psalms, not to speak of his Commentaries on other parts of the Old Testament, to be convinced that his knowledge of the Hebrew language was accurate and minute, considering the age in which he lived He frequently enters into a critical examination of the original text, and manifests by his philological remarks, brief though they be, an intimate acquaintance with that language; arriving, in his interpretations, at the same results to which a more profound exegesis and a more minute attention to philology have conducted modern critics. Often, when he does not professedly criticise the Hebrew text, or make his statements in the form of criticisms the Hebrew scholar will perceive that his remarks are founded upon a close attention to the strict meaning of the Hebrew words, and that he frequently states their precise import with much force, felicity, and delicacy of expression. Nor is proof wanting, from this Commentary, that Calvin had traveled over the whole field of knowledge, in so far as it had been explored in his day. From ancient and modern systems of philosophy, from civil and ecclesiastical history, as well as from the Greek and Roman classical he draws materials, and shows how he could employ with ease and power, and yet without the least ostentation or pedantry, his varied acquisitions for the illustration of sacred truth.

In short this Work is pervaded by earnest piety and much Christian experience. Its whole tone evinces it to be the fruit of a soul which felt the deep workings of piety; of a Soul in which the love of God was extreme, which sought its rest and happiness in him alone, which recognised his hand and providence in every event, which confided in him in all circumstances, which looked to him as a Father and a friend for every blessing, and which, in all its powers, was

consecrated with entire devotedness to Christ and the Gospel. It everywhere, too, bespeaks the man of large religious experience. Whether the author comments on the plaintive songs in which grief pours forth its bitterness, or on the triumphant and joyful songs in which the perfections and providence of God, individual and national deliverances are celebrated; whether he speaks of David's religious exercises, or of the trials of his life, or of his inward conflicts, we perceive a mind which had itself experienced much of what it illustrates. This experience eminently qualified Calvin to be an interpreter of The Psalms. Placed often in circumstances similar to those of David, as he graphically describes in his Preface, he was thus enabled accurately to conceive of David's train of thinking, to see things as it were with his eyes, to trace the complexion and character of his feelings, and thus to portray them in so just and natural a manner, that we are almost ready to think, in perusing the description of them, that they are described by David himself.

This Work has been translated from the original Latin, and collated with the French version, which was written by the author himself. The French edition which has been used, and which was doubtless the last corrected under the author's eye, was printed in 1563, and is described on the title-page as "So carefully revised, and so faithfully compared with the Latin version, that it may be considered a new translation." While the Translator has made the Latin version his text book, he has throughout carefully collated it with the French version, by which he has been greatly aided in giving a clearer and fuller representation of his author's meaning. The French version having made its appearance after the Latin, and being written in Calvin's native tongue, in which he might be expected to write with greater ease than in a dead language, admired though his Latin works are for the purity of their classic diction, it

contains numerous expansions of thought and expression, by which he removes the occasional obscurities of the Latin version, which is written in a style more compressed and concise. Sometimes, though not often, we meet with a complete sentence in the French version which is not to be found in the Latin; but the cases are of frequent occurrence, in which, by inserting into the French version a clause at the beginning, the middle, or the end of a sentence, which does not occur in the Latin, he explains what is obscure in the latter version, or introduces a new thought or expresses his meaning with greater clearness and with greater copiousness of language. These additional clauses the Translator has introduced into the text in their Proper place, and indicated them by adding the original French in the form of notes at the foot of the page. He, however, sometimes translates from the French version where it seems fuller and more perspicuous than the Latin, without indicating this by foot-notes. In a few instances, where the expression in the two versions is different, he has given the expression of both, retaining that of the Latin version in the texts and transferring that of the French to the foot of the page.

With respect to the principle on which he has proceeded in the task of translating, it is sufficient simply to state, that he has endeavored to express the meaning of his author in language as true to the original as possible, avoiding being too literal on the one hand, and too loose on the other; as this, in his apprehension, is the method by which a translator can best succeed in faithfully representing to the reader the sense as well as the style and manner of his author.

Calvin's version of the Sacred Text has been given in preference to that of our English Bible, as this was necessary to the clear understanding of his illustrations.

The two versions, however, nearly resemble each other:often our English version is an accurate translation of Calvin's, at other times the marginal readings which are in some of our English Bibles. He, however, not infrequently differs from both; and in some instances, though not in all, where he does differ, his translation appears to be superior in accuracy, and places the sentiment of the original in a clearer light, and with greater effect than is done in our English version. The Scriptural quotations which he makes have been given in the words of our English Bible, except in those cases in which his argument required his own translation of the passage to be retained.

This Work was translated into English some years after its first appearance by Arthur Golding, whose translation was published at London in 1571. Arthur Golding, who was of a gentleman's family and a native of London, was one of the most distinguished translators of the Roman classics in the age of Queen Elizabeth, when the translation of these valuable works of antiquity into the English language employed every pen. He translated Justin's History, Caesar's Commentaries, Ovid's Metamorphoses, Seneca's Benefits, and other classic authors; as well as various modern French and Latin works, among which are a number of Calvin's writings, besides The Psalms. His only original work appears to have been, "A Discourse upon the Earthquake that happened through the Realme of Englande, and other places of Christendom, the sixt of Aprill 1580," published in 16mo. "It is to be regretted," says Warton, "that he gave so much of his time to translation." [fa9] Golding was no doubt a good classical scholar, and well acquainted with the style of Calvin; but as his translation was executed nearly three hundred years ago, it every where abounds with words and phrases which are become antiquated and obsolete, from the great change which the English language has undergone since that period. Being

on this account frequently very obscure, often unintelligible, it fails in giving a just representation to an English reader of the present day of Calvin's work, and leads him to form a less favorable estimate of its value than is due to its high merits. Besides, Golding does not appear to have seen the French version, which affords to a translator so much assistance in the faithful representation of Calvin's meaning.

With respect to the Notes with which this Translation is accompanied, they are intended to enable the reader clearly to understand the meaning of such of Calvin's philological remarks and criticisms as are obscure, from the brevity with which they are stated; or to exhibit Calvin's merits as a commentator, by showing how frequently his interpretations are adopted and supported by the most eminent Biblical critics, or to illustrate the Sacred Text, by showing the precise meaning of the Hebrew words, or by explaining some portion of natural history, or some eastern custom or manner to which there is an allusion. The ancient versions afford important assistance in the explanation of difficult passages, and their rendering of particular texts has been occasionally given when this contributes to elucidate them, or to throw light on Calvin's observations. Of these versions the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and Jerome's, are the only ones which he appears to have consulted, and to the first he frequently refers.

As the Translations of The Calvin Society are intended for the whole Christian community, it has been deemed out of place to enter upon theological questions on which difference of opinion exists among the various denominations of the Christian community. In making these Notes, the Editor has often compared Calvin's translation of the Sacred Text with the original Hebrew, and with the

Septuagint, Vulgate, and Jerome's versions. He has also consulted a considerable number of critical works on The Psalms by some of the most eminent Biblical scholars who have written on this book, either as a separate undertaking, or in common with the other books of Scripture. Of the rich stores of erudition thus supplied he has freely made use; as in the course of the work he has carefully marked his authorities, as this will give greater weight to his statements. Many of the authors who are quoted were men of distinguished learning, judgment, and piety, possessed a profound acquaintance with the Hebrew language, and had devoted years of laborious study to the investigation of the meaning of this sacred book; and it is wonderful to find how closely the results of Calvin's investigations, even on the most difficult passages harmonise with the results to which modern critics guided by the principles of accurate hermeneutics, have arrived. This has often forced itself upon the attention of the Editor, and the more he has compared Calvin's criticisms and interpretations with the labors of these learned men, the higher has been raised his admiration of the ingenuity, penetration, learning, and critical acumen of this great commentator. Not a few, indeed, of the most beautiful interpretations which are to be found in Commentaries and critical works were first given forth by Calvin, although the source in which they originated has been forgotten. It may here be stated that the examination of the philology of the Sacred Text, and of critical works on the subject, has led the Editor to observe how closely Calvin often adheres in his interpretations to the import of the original Hebrew, and enabled him in many cases in the course of the translation to represent the meaning of his author more correctly than he could otherwise have done as well as to avoid mistakes into which Golding has sometimes fallen, evidently from his not being acquainted with the philology of the passage, or the criticism which Calvin briefly states or refers took and

which it is difficult for the reader clearly to understand, unless he find it more fully stated in some other critical work.

The Editor has to express his obligations to two of his friends who materially aided in the preparation of the latter part of this volume,—the late Revelation Alexander Duncan, A.M., formerly of Dundee, and the Revelation James M'lean, whose able translation of several of the Psalms left him little more to do than the labor of revision and annotation. The Editor and the Society have also been much indebted to the Revelation Thomas M'crie, Professor of Divinity, Edinburgh, not only in general for the benefit of his experience, but also for the trouble he has taken in examining the sheets of this Volume while passing through the press, and for many important suggestions. The Editor has great satisfaction in thus publicly acknowledging his obligations.

A facsimile of the Title-Page of the French version which we have used, and of the title-page of Arthur Golding's translation, together with his Dedication, are prefixed to this Volume.

It remains only to be added, that the last Volume will contain copious Indices of the principal matters contained in the Commentary and Notes, of the passages of Scripture more or less illustrated, and of the Hebrew words referred to or explained.

J. A.

Edinburgh, June 1845.