# CHAPTER 23.

## THE "INSTITUTES."

*Calvin Discards the Aristotelian Method — How a True Science of Astronomy is Formed — Calvin Proceeds in the same way in Constructing his Theology — Induction — Christ Himself sets the Example of the Inductive Method — Calvin goes to the Field of Scripture — His Pioneers — The Schoolmen — Melanchthon — Zwingli — The Augsburg Confession — Calvin's System more Complete — Two Tremendous Facts — First Edition of the Institutes — Successive Editions — The Creed its Model — Enumeration of its Principal Themes-God the Sole Fountain of all things — Christ the One Source of Redemption and Salvation — The Spirit the One Agent in the Application of Redemption — The Church — Her Worship and Government.*

**PICTURE: View of Basle**

We shall now proceed to the consideration of that work which has exercised so vast an influence on the great movement we are narrating, and which all will admit, even though they may dissent from some of its' teachings, to be, in point of logical compactness, and constructive comprehensive genius, truly grand. It is not of a kind that discloses its solidity and gigantic proportions to the casual or passing glance. It must be leisurely contemplated. In the case of some kingly mountain, whose feet are planted in the depths but whose top is lost in the light of heaven, we must remove to a distance, and when the little hills which had seemed to overtop it when we stood at its base have sunk below the horizon, then it is that the true monarch stands out before us in un-approached and unchallenged supremacy. So with the *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* No such production had emanated from the theological intellect since the times of the great Father of the West — Augustine.

During the four centuries that preceded Calvin, there had been no lack of theories and systems. The schoolmen had toiled to put the world in possession of truth; but their theology was simply abstraction piled upon abstraction, and the more elaborately they speculated the farther they

strayed. Their systems had no basis in fact: they had no root in the revelation of God; they were a speculation, not knowledge.

Luther and Calvin struck out a new path in theological discovery. They discarded the Aristotelian method as a vicious one, though the fashionable and, indeed, the only one until their time, and they adopted the Baconian method, though Bacon had not yet been born to give his name to his system. Calvin saw the folly of retiring into the dark closet of one's own mind, as the schoolmen did, and out of such materials as they were able to create, fashioning a theology. Taking his stand upon the open field of revelation, he essayed to glean those God-created and Heaven-revealed truths which lie there, and he proceeded to build them up into a system of knowledge which should have power to enlighten the intellect and to sanctify the hearts of the men of the sixteenth century. Calvin's first question was not, "Who am I?" but "Who is God?" He looked at God from the stand-point of the human conscience, with the torch of the Bible in his hand. God was to him the beginning of knowledge. The heathen sage said, "Know thyself." But a higher Authority had said, "The fear," that is the knowledge, "of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." It is in the light that all things are seen. "God is light."

In chemistry, in botany, in astronomy, he is the best philosopher who most carefully studies nature, most industriously collects facts, and most skilfully arranges them into a system or science. Not otherwise can the laws of the material universe, and the mutual relations of the bodies that compose it, be discovered. We must proceed in theology just as we proceed in natural science. He is the best theologian who most carefully studies Scripture, who most accurately brings out the meaning of its individual statements or truths, and who so classifies these as to exhibit that whole scheme of doctrine that is contained in the Bible. Not otherwise than by induction can we arrive at a true science: not otherwise than by induction can we come into possession of a true theology. The botanist, instead of shutting himself up in his closet, goes forth into the field and collects into classes the *flora* spread profusely, and without apparent order, over plain and mountain, grouping plant with plant, each according to its kind, till not one is left, and then his science of botany is perfected. The astronomer, instead of descending into some dark cave, turns his telescope to the heavens, watches the motions of its orbs, and by means of

the bodies that are seen, he deduces the laws and forces that are unseen, and thus order springs up before his eye, and the system off the universe unveils itself to him. What the *flora* of the field are to the botanist, what the stars of the firmament are to the astronomer, the truths scattered over the pages of the Bible are to the theologian. The Master Himself has given us the hint that it is the inductive method which we are to follow in our search after Divine truth; nay, He has herein gone before us and set us the example, for beginning at Moses and the prophets, He expounded to His disciples "in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." It was to these pages that Calvin turned. He searched them through and through, he laid all the parts of the Word of God under contribution: its histories and dramas, its Psalms and prophecies, its Gospels and Epistles. With profound submission of mind he accepted whatever he found taught there; and having collected his materials, he proceeded with the severest logic, and in the exercise of a marvellous constructive genius, to frame his system — to erect the temple. To use the beautiful simile of D'Aubigne, "He went to the Gospel springs, and there collecting into a golden cup the pure and living waters of Divine revelation, presented them to the nations to quench their thirst."[1]

We have said that Calvin was the first to open this path, but the statement is not to be taken literally and absolutely. He had several pioneers in this road; but none of them had trodden it with so firm a step, or left it so thoroughly open for men to follow, as Calvin did. By far the greatest of his pioneers was Augustine. But even the *City of God*, however splendid as a dissertation, is yet as a system much inferior to the *Institutes,* in completeness as well as in logical power. After Augustine there comes a long and dreary interval, during which no attempt was made to classify and systematize the truths of revelation. The attempt of Johannes Damascenus, in the eighth century, is a very defective performance, Not more successful were the efforts of the schoolmen. The most notable of these were the four books of *Sentences* by Peter Lombard, and the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, but both are defective and erroneous. In perusing the theological productions of that age, we become painfully sensible of strength wasted, owing to the adoption of an entirely false method of interpreting the Word of God — a method which, we ought to say, was a *forsaking* rather than an *interpreting* of the Scriptures; for in the

schoolmen we have a body of ingenious and laborious men, who have withdrawn themselves from the light of the Bible into the dark chamber of their own minds, and are weaving systems of theology out of their brains and the traditions of their Church, in which errors are much more plentiful than truths, and which possess no power to pacify the conscience, or to purify the life.

When we reach the age of the Reformation the true light again greets our eyes. Luther was no systematiser on a great scale; Melanchthon made a more considerable essay in that direction. His *Loci Communes,* or Common Places, published in 1521, were a prodigious advance on the systems of the schoolmen. They are quickened by the new life, but yet their mold is essentially mediaeval, and is too rigid and unbending to permit a free display of the piety of the author. The *Commentarius de Vera et Falsa Religione,* or Commentary on the True and False Religion, of Zwingli, published in 1525, is freed from the scholastic method of Melanchthon's performance, but is still defective as a formal system of theology. The *Confession of Augsburg* (1530) is more systematic and complete than any of the foregoing, but still simply a confession of faith, and not such an exhibition of Divine Truth as the Church required. It remained for Calvin to give it this. The *Intitutes of the Christian Religion* was a confession of faith,[2] a system of exegesis, a body of polemics and apologetics, and an exhibition of the rich practical effects which flow from Christianity — it was all four in one. Calvin takes his reader by the hand and conducts him round the entire territory of truth; he shows him the strength and grandeur of its central citadel — namely, its God-given doctrines; the height and solidity of its ramparts; the gates by which it is approached; the order that reigns within; the glory of the Lamb revealed in the Word that illuminates it with continual day; the River of Life by which it was watered that is, the Holy Spirit; this, he exclaims, is the "City of the Living God," this is the "Heavenly Jerusalem ;" decay or overthrow never can befall it, for it is built upon the foundation of prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone. Into this city "there entereth nothing that defileth, or maketh a lie," and the "nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light thereof."

That Calvin's survey of the field of supernatural truth as contained in the Bible was complete; that his classification of its individual facts was

perfect; that his deductions and conclusions were in all cases sound, and that his system was without error, Calvin himself did not maintain, and it would ill become even the greatest admirer of that guarded, qualified, and balanced Calvinism which the Reformer taught — not that caricature of it which some of his followers have presented, a Calvinism which disjoins the means from the end, which destroys the freedom of man and abolishes his accountability; which is fatalism, in short, and is no more like the Calvinism of Calvin than Mahommedanism is like Christianity — it would ill become any one, we say, to challenge for Calvin's system an immunity from error which he himself did not challenge for it. He found himself, in pursuing his investigations in the field of Scripture, standing face to face with two tremendous facts — God's sovereignty and man's freedom; both he believed to be facts; he maintained the last as firmly as the first; he confessed that he could not reconcile the two, he left this and all other mysteries connected with supernatural truth to be solved by the deeper researches and the growing light of the ages to come, if it were meant that they should ever find their solution on earth.

This work was adopted by the Reformed Church, and after some years published in most of the languages of Christendom. The clearness and strength of its; logic; the simplicity and beauty of ifs exposition; the candour of its conclusions; the fullness of its doctrinal statements, and not less the warm spiritual life that throbbed under its deductions, now bursting out in rich practical exhortation, and now soaring into a vein of lofty speculation, made the Church feel that no book like this had the Reformation given her heretofore; and she accepted it, as at once a confession of her faith, an answer to all charges whether from the Roman camp or from the infidel one, and her justification alike before those now living and the ages to come, against the violence with which the persecutor was seeking to overwhelm her.

The first edition of the *Institutes* contained only six chapters. During all his life after he continued to elaborate and perfect the work. Edition after edition continued to issue from the press. These were published in Latin, but afterwards rendered into French, and translated into all the tongues of Europe. "During twenty-four years," says Bungener, "the book increased in every edition, not as an edifice to which additions are made, but as a tree which develops itself naturally, freely, and without the compromise of its

unity for a moment."[3] It is noteworthy that the publication of the work fell on the mid-year of the Reformer's life. Twenty-seven years had he been preparing for writing it, and twenty-seven years did he survive to expand and perfect it; nevertheless, not one of its statements or doctrines did he essentially alter or modify. It came, too, at the right time as regards the Reformation.[4]

We shall briefly examine the order and scope of the book. It proposes two great ends, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man. It employs the first to attain the second. "The whole sum of wisdom," said the author at the outset, "is that by knowing God each of us knows himself also."[5] If man was made in the image of God, then surely the true way to know what our moral and spiritual powers are, or ought to be, what are the relations in which we stand to God, and what the service of love and obedience we owe him, is not to study the dim and now defaced image, but to turn our eye upon the undimmed and glorious Original — the Being in whose likeness man was created.

The image of God, it is argued, imprinted upon our own souls would have sufficed to reveal him to us if we had not fallen. But sin has defaced that image. Nevertheless, we are not left in darkness, for God has graciously given us a second revelation of himself in his Word. Grasping that torch, and holding it aloft, Calvin proceeds on his way, and bids all who would know the eternal mysteries follow that shining light. Thus it was that the all-sufficiency and supreme and sole authority of the Scriptures took a leading place in the system of the Reformer.

The order of the work is simplicity itself. It is borrowed from the Apostles' Creed, whose four cardinal doctrines furnish the Reformer with the argument of the four books in which he finally arranged the *Institutes.*

**I.** *"I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and eartie."* Such is the argument of the first book. In it Calvin brings God before us in his character of Creator and sovereign Ruler of the world. But we must note that his treatment of this theme is eminently moral. 'It is no scenic exhibition of omnipotent power and infinite wisdom, as shown in the building of the fabric of the heavens and the earth, that passes before us. From the first line the author places himself and us in the eye of conscience. The question, Can the knowledge of God as Creator conduct

to salvation? leads the Reformer to discuss in successive chapters the doctrine of the fall; the necessity of another and clearer revelation; the proofs of the inspiration of the Bible. He winds up with some chapters on Providence, as exercised in the government of all things, and in the superintendence of each particular thing and person in the universe. In these chapters Calvin lays the foundations for that tremendous conclusion at which he arrives in the book touching election, which has been so stumbling to many, and which is solemn and mysterious to all.

**II.** "And *in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten Son."* The knowledge of God as Redeemer is the argument of book second. This ushers the author upon a higher stage, and places him amid grander themes. All that led up to the redemption accomplished on Calvary, as well as the redemption itself, is here discussed. Sin, the ruin of man, and his inability to be his own savior; the moral law; the gracious purpose of God in giving it, namely, to convince man of sin, and make him feel his need of a Savior; such are the successive and majestic steps by which Calvin advances to the Cross. Arrived there, we have a complete Christology: Jesus very God, very Man, Prophet, Priest, and King; and his death an eternal redemption, inasmuch as it was an actual, full, and complete expiation of the sins of his people. The book closes with the collected light of the Bible concentrated upon the Cross, and revealing it with a noonday clearness, as a fully accomplished redemption, the one impregnable ground of the sinner's hope.

**III.** "*I believe in the Holy Ghost."* That part of redemption which it is the office of the Spirit to accomplish, is the argument to which the author now addresses himself. The theme of the second book is a righteousness accomplished without the sinner: in the third book we are shown a righteousness accomplished within him. Calvin insists not less emphatically upon the last as an essential part of redemption than upon the first. The sinner's destruction was within him, his salvation must in like manner be within him; an atonement without him will not save him unless he have a holiness within him. But what, asks the author, is the bond of connection between the sinner and the righteousness accomplished without him? That bond, he answers, is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works faith in the sinner, and by that faith, as with a hand, he receives a two-fold benefit — a righteousness which is imputed to him, and a regeneration

which is wrought within him. By the first he obtains the justification of his person, by the second the sanctification of his soul, and a fitness for that glory everlasting of which he became the heir in the moment of his justification. The one grand corollary from all this is that man's salvation is exclusively, and from first to last, of God's sovereign grace.

Thus do Calvin and Luther meet. They have traveled by different routes; the first has advanced by a long and magnificent demonstration, the second has by a sudden inspiration, as it were, grasped the truth; but here at last the two mighty chiefs stand side by side on the ground of "Salvation of God," and taking each other by the hand, they direct their united assault against the fortress of Rome, "Salvation of man."

The moment in which Calvin arrived at this conclusion formed an epoch in the history of Christianity — that is, of the human race. It was the full and demonstrated recovery of a truth that lies at the foundation of all progress, inasmuch as it is the channel of those supernatural and celestial influences by which the human soul is quickened, and society advanced. The doctrine of justification by faith, of which St. Paul had been led to put on record so full and clear an exposition, early began to be corrupted. By the times of Augustine even, very erroneous views were held on this most important subject; and that great Father was not exempt from the obscurity of his age. After his day the corruption rapidly increased. The Church of Rome was simply an elaborate and magnificent exhibition of the doctrine of "Salvation by works." The language of all its dogmas, and every one of its rites, was "Man his own savior." Luther placed underneath the stupendous fabric of Rome the doctrine which, driven by his soul-agonies to the Divine page, he had there discovered — "Salvation by grace" — and the edifice fell to the ground. This was the application that Luther made of the doctrine. The use to which Calvin put it was more extensive; he brought out its bearings upon the whole scheme of Christian doctrine, and made it the basis of the *Reformation* of the Church in the largest and widest sense of the term. In the hands of Luther it is the *power* of the doctrine which strikes us; in those of Calvin it is its *truth*, and *universality*, lying entrenched as it were within its hundred lines of doctrinal circumvallation, and dominating the whole territory of truth in such fashion as to deny to error, of every sort and name, so much as a foot-breadth on which to take root and flourish.

**IV.** "*I believe in the Holy Catholic Church.*" The term Church, in its strict sense, he applied to the children of God; in its looser sense, to all who made profession of the Gospel, for the instruction and government of whom, God had instituted, he held, pastors and teachers. Touching the worship and government of the Church, Calvin laid down the principle of the unlawfulness of introducing anything without positive Scripture sanction. "This, he thought, would go to the root of the matter, and sweep away at once the whole mass of sacramentalism and ceremonialism, of ritualism and hierarchism, which had grown up between the apostolic age and the Reformation."[6] Augustine deplored the prevalence of the rites and ceremonies of his time, but he lacked a definite principle with which to combat and uproot them. These ceremonies and rites had become yet more numerous in Luther's day; but neither had he any weapon wherewith to grapple effectually with them. He opposed them mainly on two grounds: first, that they were burdensome; and secondly, that they contained more or less the idea of merit, and so tended to undermine the doctrine of justification by faith. Calvin sought for a principle which should clear the ground of that whole noxious growth at once, and he judged that he had found such a principle in the following — namely, that not only were many of these ceremonies contrary to the first and second precepts of the Decalogue, and therefore to be condemned as idolatrous; but that in the mass they were without warrant in the Word of God, and were therefore to be rejected as unlawful.

In regard to Church government, the means which the Reformer adopted for putting an end to all existing corruptions and abuses, and preventing their recurrence, are well summed up by Dr. Cunningham. He sought to attain this end —

> "**First**, by putting an end to anything like the exercise of monarchical authority in the Church, or independent power vested officially in one man, which was the origin and root of the Papacy.
>
> **Second**, by falling back upon the combination of aristocracy and democracy, which prevailed for at least the first two centuries of the Christian era, when the Churches were governed by the common council of Presbyters, and these Presbyters were chosen by the

Churches themselves, though tried and ordained by those who had been previously admitted to office.

**Third**, by providing against the formation of a spirit of a mere priestly caste, by associating with the ministers in the administration of ecclesiastical affairs, a class of men who, though ordained Presbyters, were usually engaged in the ordinary occupations of society; and fourth, by trying to prevent a repetition of the history of the rise and growth of the prelacy and the Papacy, through the perversion of the one-man power, by fastening the substance of these great principles upon the conscience of the Church as binding *jure divino.*"[7]

# CHAPTER 24.

## CALVIN ON PREDESTINATION AND ELECTION.

*Calvin's Views on the Affirmative Side — God as the Author of all things Ordains all that is to come to pass — The Means equally with the End comprehended in the Decree — As Sovereign, God Executes all that comes to pass — Calvin's Views on the Negative Side — Man a Free Agent — Man an Accountable Being — Calvin maintained side by side God's Eternal Ordination and Man's Freedom of Action — Cannot Reconcile the Two — Liberty and Necessity — Tremendous Difficulties confessed to Attach to Both Theories — Explanations — Locke and Sir William Hamilton — Growth of the Institutes.*

WE have reserved till now our brief statement of Calvin's views on the subject of predestination and election — the shroud, in the eyes of some, in which he has wrapped up his theology; the rock, in the view of others, on which he has planted it. Our business as historians is neither to impugn nor to defend, but simply to narrate; to state, with all the clearness, fairness, and brevity possible, what Calvin held and taught on this great point. The absolute sovereignty of God was Calvin's cornerstone. As the Author and Ruler of his own universe, he held that God must proceed in his government of his creatures according to a definite plan; that that plan he had formed unalterably and unchangeably from everlasting; that it embraced not merely the grander issues of Providence, but the whole array of means by which these issues are reached; that this plan God fully carries out in time; and that, though formed according to the good pleasure of his will, it is based on reasons infinitely wise and righteous, although these have not been made known to us. Such was Calvin's first and fundamental position.

This larger and wider form of the question, to which is given the name of predestination, embraces and disposes of the minor one, namely, election. If God from everlasting pre-ordained the whole history and ultimate fate of all his creatures, it follows that he pre-ordained the destiny of each individual. Calvin taught, as Augustine had done before him, that out of a race all equally guilty and condemned, God had elected some to everlasting

life, and that this decree of the election of some to life, implied the reprobation of the rest to death, but that their own sin and not God's decree was the reason of their perishing. The Reformer further was careful to teach that the election of some to life did not proceed on God's fore-knowledge of their faith and good works, but that, on the contrary, their election was the efficient cause of their faith and holiness.

These doctrines the Reformer embraced because it appeared to him that they were the doctrines taught in the Scriptures on the point in question; that they were proclaimed in the facts of history; and that they were logically and inevitably deducible from the idea of the supremacy, the omnipotence, and intelligence of God. Any other scheme appeared to him inconsistent with these attributes of the Deity, and, in fact, a dethroning of God as the Sovereign of the universe which he had called into existence, and an abandonment of its affairs to blind chance.

Such was the positive or affirmative side of Calvin's views. We shall now briefly consider the negative side, in order to see his whole mind on the question. The Reformer abhorred and repudiated the idea that God was the Author of sin, and he denied that any such inference could be legitimately drawn from his doctrine of predestination. He denied, too, with the same emphasis, that any constraint or force was put by the decree upon the will of man, or any restraint upon his actions; but that, on the contrary, all men enjoyed that spontaneity of will and freedom of action which are essential to moral accountability. He repudiated, moreover, the charge of fatalism which has sometimes been brought against his doctrine, maintaining that inasmuch as the means were fore-ordained as well as the end, his teaching had just the opposite effect, and instead of relaxing it tended to brace the soul, to give it a more vigorous temper; and certainly the qualities of perseverance and indomitable energy which were so conspicuously shown in Calvin's own life, and which have generally characterised those communities who have embraced his scheme of doctrine, go far to bear out the Reformer in this particular, and to show that the belief in predestination inspires with courage, prompts to activity and effort, and mightily sustains hope.

The Reformer was of opinion that he saw in the history of the world a proof that the belief in pre-destination — that predestination, namely,

which links the means with the end, and arranges that the one shall be reached only through the other — is to make the person feel that he is working alongside a Power that cannot be baffled; that he is pursuing the same ends which that Power is prosecuting, and that, therefore, he must and shall finally be crowned with victory. This had, he thought, been exemplified equally in nations and in individuals.

Calvin was by no means insensible to the tremendous difficulties that environ the whole subject. The depth as well as range of his intellectual and moral vision gave him a fuller and clearer view than perhaps the majority of his opponents have had of these great difficulties. But these attach, not to one side of the question, but to both; and Calvin judged that he could not escape them, nor even diminish them by one iota, by shifting his position. The absolute fore-knowledge of God called up all these difficulties equally with his absolute pre-ordination; nay, they beset the question of God's executing all things in time quite as much as the question of his decreeing all things from eternity. Most of all do these difficulties present themselves in connection with what is but another form of the same question, namely, the existence of moral evil. That is all awful reality. Why should God, all-powerful and all-holy, have created man, foreseeing that he would sin and be lost? why not have created him, if he created him at all, without the possibility of sinning? or why should not God cut short in the cradle that existence which if allowed to develop will, he foresees, issue in wrong and injury to others, and in the ruin of the person himself? Is there any one, whether on the Calvinistic or on the Arminian side, who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions? Calvin freely admitted that he could not reconcile God's absolute sovereignty with man's free will; but he felt himself obliged to admit and believe both; both accordingly he maintained; though it was not in his power, nor, he believed, in the power of any man, to establish a harmony between them. What he aimed at was to proceed in this solemn path as far as the lights of revelation and reason could conduct him; and when their guidance failed, when he came to the thick darkness, and stood in the presence of mysteries that refused to unveil themselves to him, reverently to bow down and adore.[1]

We judged it essential to give this brief account of the theology of the *Institutes.* The book was the chest that contained the vital forces of the

Reformation. It may be likened to the living spirits that animated the wheels in the prophet's vision. The leagues, battles, and majestic movements of that age all proceeded from this center of power — these arcana of celestial forces. It is emphatically the Reformation. The book, we have said, as it first saw the light in Basle in 1536 was small (pp. 514); it consisted of but six chapters, and was a sketch in outline of the fundamental principles of the Christian faith. The work grew into unity and strength, grandeur and completeness, by the patient and persevering touches of the author, and when completed it consisted of four books and eighty-four chapters. But as in the acorn is wrapped up all that is afterwards evolved in the full-grown oak, so in the first small edition of the *Institutes* were contained all the great principles which we now possess, fully developed and demonstrated, in the last and completed edition of 1559.