

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

The Influence of Calvinism on Our American System of Education.

JOHN THEODORE MUELLER, St. Louis, Mo.

(Read before the Western District Teachers' Conference and published
by request.)

PART II.

Ideas of Education.

What has been said so far shows how great the influence of Calvinism on American education of necessity must be. However, this influence was not exerted in a direct way. As far as the declaration of educational principles is concerned, Calvin himself was not a great educator, such as Luther and Melanchthon were. Monroe, in his *Text-book in the History of Education*, devotes but a few lines to John Calvin, whereas he gives pages of his book to Luther, Melanchthon, and others. Calvin did not even write a treatise on education, as Zwingli did, whose work *How to Educate the Young in Good Manners and Discipline* (1524), with its three parts: "1. Instruction in the things that belong to God; 2. in the things that pertain to self; 3. in the things that concern our fellow-men," shows a mind wide awake to the problems of Christian education. It is true, the ecclesiastical polity which Calvin established in Geneva in 1541 did not overlook the interests of education. Calvin there reorganized a Latin school and impressed upon it a rigorous type of discipline and piety. In summer the recitations began at six in the morning, in winter at seven. The students were required to attend divine worship once every school-day and three times on Sunday. *The Lord's Prayer and the Creed were in the course of study.* All the students were taught to sing and intone the psalms. As in the *Gymnasien* of Germany, the ancient languages, as an aid to Biblical exercises, occupied a large

part of the seven-year course. Calvin himself was one of the teachers, and it is said that his students daily numbered a thousand. In discussing a suitable head for the institution, he said: "Let the principal, being a man of at least average knowledge, be especially of a debonair spirit, and not rude or severe in his manner, in order that he may give a good example to the children in all his life, and that he may thus bear so much more gently the labor of his office." (F. V. N. Painter's *History of Education*, p. 172.) Of this school Hugh Reyburn, in his work *John Calvin; His Life, Letters, and Work*, says: "In addition to the desire to turn out men who were able to defend the Reformed faith and who were willing to propagate it, he desired to create an institution for the study of learning for its own sake. It was no mere theological hall which he desired to call into existence. It was a university, with a carefully graded system of instruction, with all the faculties in full working order, with the best men he could lay hands on in the professors' chairs, and with the richest endowments he could persuade donors to furnish. (Note influence on modern universities.) He himself had none of the specialist's narrowness. He specialized on the basis of a broad and deep culture. He was as competent to lecture on the classics as he was to lecture on the Gospels or Epistles. He knew as much about law as he did about theology. . . . He did all he could to attract to Geneva learned men. He surrounded himself with these men. He made them professors, regents, teachers, preachers, anything that would give them an opportunity of passing on to others the knowledge which they themselves had acquired. He himself was one of the most brilliant scholars of his time. . . . It became a commonplace that a boy of Geneva could give a more rational account of his faith than a Doctor of the Sorbonne. . . . He was by this time a physical wreck, and his strength was gone. But the work he did not only raised a bulwark in defense of liberty against which the waves of bigotry and intolerance beat in vain, but sent forth a stream of eager and well-trained disciples, who carried the war into the enemies' country and became all over Western Europe the most dangerous foes that Rome had to fear. Thanks to the spirit with which he inspired it by his labors in its councils, in its churches, and in its schools, he turned the little city into an impregnable stronghold, the metropolis of the Reformed faith, an ark of refuge to the distressed and persecuted, a seat of learning second to none in its day for attractiveness and influence, and the home of a race of brave, God-fearing men." (pp. 289, 290.) With regard to the university it might be

added that "all instruction was free, and that in the higher classes it was given in Latin. No degrees were given, but the equivalent of a graduation ceremony was found in Promotion Day, when the scholars formally received promotion from a lower class to a higher one." (Hugh Y. Reyburn, *o. c.*, p. 289.)

Thus, while John Calvin did not write books or treatises on education, he did organize a university, a school of learning, which represented the best educational ideas of his day and became the model to all who were influenced by him. Froude, in his *Short Studies on Great Subjects*, says of Calvinism: "Calvinism was the spirit which rises in revolt against untruth; the spirit which, as I have shown you, has appeared, and reappeared, and in due time will appear again, unless God be a delusion and man be as the beasts that perish." (p. 52.) This may be applied to education as represented at that time by the Roman Catholic Church. Vollmer, in his *Life of John Calvin*, asserts: "We to-day believe that the education of all citizens is fundamental to the welfare of the Republic. This principle, however, it should be understood, is a logical result of Calvinistic thought and practise. Calvinists, taught by the Holy Scriptures, made religion a personal matter, not between man and the Church, but between the soul and God, and necessitated personal knowledge on the part of human beings of God's Word as the law of faith and life. Education in religious truth became therefore a cardinal principle of the Calvinists, and the steps were easy and swift from it to secular and popular education. This logical connection between Calvinism and education is acknowledged by our historian Baneroft, who says that Calvin was the 'first founder of the public school system.' It is also shown by the history of popular education. A high authority states that Presbyterian Scotland 'is entitled to the credit of having first established schools for primary instruction to be supported at public expense.' The Scotch system of free education was founded in 1567, fifty years before the American Calvinist colonies had been established. Reformed Holland followed closely in the footsteps of Scotland, and the first settlers in New England and the Middle States, being themselves Calvinists, naturally proceeded at once, like their European brethren of similar faith, to care for the interests of education. Harvard, Yale, and Princeton universities were all founded by men who believed in the Westminster Confession, and as early as 1647 Massachusetts and Connecticut established public school systems." (pp. 204. 205.)

Richard G. Boone, Professor of Pedagogy in Indiana Univer-

sity, says: "John Calvin, at Geneva, in the sixteenth century, made education, so far as he might, obligatory upon all; and to-day the thrifty cantons of Switzerland enjoy the beneficent influence of a law of whose significance the author little dreamed. Tracing the growth of this impulse, George Bancroft says: 'The common-school system was derived from Geneva, the work of John Calvin, introduced by Luther into Germany [?], by John Knox into Scotland, and so became the property of the English-speaking nation.' (*Education in the United States*, pp. 6. 7.) In the Colonies, in the New York settlements, schools were found as early as 1633. The second Director-General, Wouter Van Twiller, brought with him in 1633 Teacher Adam Roelandsen, the first schoolmaster. (p. 10.) In Virginia schools are mentioned as early as 1622. (p. 13.) In New England the people of Boston on the 13th of April, 1635, in town meeting assembled, "impressed not less with their need of schools than with their appreciation of education in general, requested 'Brother Philemon Purmont to become schoolmaster for the teaching and nurturing of children' in the town. In part pay for his services thirty acres of land were voted him by the young colony. Almost immediately 'a garden plot was voted to Mr. Danyell Maude, schoolmaster,' also. Both of these occurred within less than a year from the founding of the town. . . . Other Massachusetts towns also showed a vigorous and liberal spirit of culture. . . . Plymouth Colony had ordered schools as early as 1650, while ten years before Dorchester had petitioned for some islands 'for and towards the maintenance of a free school.'" (pp. 14. 15.) "It would seem that the first school in Connecticut was at New Haven, during the year 1638." (p. 18.) "The first school appearing on the town records of Hartford was in operation as early as 1641. . . . Throughout the Colonies, schools were endowed; first with lands, very early with bequests, rents, and donations, and supplemented by taxation. They were not free. Tuition was paid for all." (p. 19.)

"In Massachusetts, by the middle of the eighteenth century, and in other New England commonwealths shortly after, elementary schools were for the most part free. These early systems of public or free schools were largely due to the religious devotion of the New England people and to the practical identity of Church and State." (Monroe, *History of Education*, p. 35.) In this they carried out the principles which John Calvin had advocated at Geneva. These principles, which exerted so great an influence, we shall now briefly study.

(To be concluded.)