

THE CALVIN ANNIVERSARY

In the mid 1950s there was a British Anglican, T.H.L. Parker, whose scholarly interest was focussed on the Reformation. He tells of a conversation with a new clerical acquaintance, where they began at one point to discuss the 16th century period. It obviously brought to the mind of his acquaintance an unpleasant figure.

“Calvin, now”, he said, “he was terrible.”

“Terrible”, I asked, “how?”

“I mean Calvin”, he said, “you know Calvin, don’t you?”

He plainly thought I had not caught the name. Calvin was terrible. No one, surely, who called himself a loyal Anglican could dissent from the verdict that Calvin was terrible.

“But why terrible?” I asked.

He found the question difficult. It was axiomatic that Calvin was terrible; but in what way, it was not easy to say, especially if one knew of him only by hearsay. But he was a strong-minded man and refused to be beaten.

“He was terrible”, he replied firmly; and then, with inspiration, “I mean, look how bad-tempered he was.”¹

It seems that most of us know John Calvin only by hearsay, and if our impression of him is not as entirely negative as that of Parker’s friend, it is usually not very positive. There is little recognition of the enormous influence that Calvin had upon, not only his contemporaries, but also the generations that succeeded him, and how much of it was positive. On this, the 500th anniversary of his birth, we hope the two fine articles that follow will help restore perspective on this significant figure.

— A.M.W.

¹ T.H.L. Parker, *Portrait of Calvin* (London: SCM Press, no date, but not later than 1954) p.8.