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A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_rande\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php)

## CALVIN AS AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE.

BY PROF. A. T. ROBERTSON, D.D.

There is little that is new to be said concerning the wonderful work of Calvin as an expounder of the Word of God. For nearly four hundred years students of the Bible have found in his lucid and sane comments the clearest light available on many points of great interest. There was once, perhaps, a tendency to overestimate the value of his work. But even so now, after all the progress made in research, there is still great value in the keen spiritual insight and intellectual acumen of Calvin. He was a real scholar in his knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, and wrote in Latin that had a classic flavor, though, like all the current ecclesiastical Latin, much modernized. He went to the sources, as every interpreter should, and thus was able to draw his water from the original fountain of truth.

Calvin took little interest in textual criticism. Indeed, the matter was little understood in his time. He did face questions of authorship at various points, but matters of introduction always held a subordinate place in his mind. He did not think that Paul wrote Hebrews, though he considered the book one of the greatest in the New Testament. He was only willing to use II. Peter with the understanding that Peter wrote it. Honesty and candor were distinct marks of the work of Calvin, hence he had little use for the allegorical method of interpretation which had been so long in vogue. He made few allusions to the old Greek commentators. He sought to interpret the book according to its real historical sense with practical applications. He over-rated the application to the Pope, as was indeed natural under the circumstances.

The dogmatic interest held him chiefly. Hence Romans was the foundation of his "Institutes." He loved the majesty of God and littleness of man developed in Romans. Indeed, Calvin was best on Paul's Epistles where the dogmatic element

is prominent. But the Prophets appealed to Calvin strongly, as did the Psalms. He began the historical books last and did not finish them. He expounded all the books save Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Esther, Nehemiah, Ezra, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Revelation. He was fond of Daniel, but said that he did not understand the Apocalypse.

He is at home on Acts, and shows fine spiritual sympathy with the narrative.

Calvin possessed historical imagination in the sense that he could make the characters live before the reader. He learned how to do this work in his lectures to theological students in Strassburg and Geneva. He seized the heart of Scripture and made it popular, though thoroughly scholarly. He came at times to have an audience of one thousand eager listeners. What he cared for most, as he himself states, was to get the spirit of the writer with clearness and brevity. He insisted on clearness and brevity as absolutely essential for a true interpreter.

He was not often led astray by long digressions (barring the Pope), but kept to the main track as a rule.

He avoided mere subtleties of language and of ideas. He did not seek to show mere ingenuity, and sought by the historical grammatical method to facilitate the real knowledge of the Scriptures.

He had withal real piety of spirit, great common sense and lucidity of style. With a real Christian experience he spoke out of a full heart.