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Tracts and Letters
Edited by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet

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ingly, in my own expressions, all the brethren; Thomas, Michael, to whom these lines will impart much sadness; Cordier, my preceptor, and the rest.

[Calvin's Let. Corresp. Opera, tom. ix. p. 15.]

LXIV.—To Monsieur de Richebourg.¹

Consolatory letter on the death of his son.

RATIBISON, [Month of April 1541.]

When I first received the intelligence of the death of Claude and of your son Louis, I was so utterly overpowered that for many days I was fit for nothing but to grieve; and albeit I was somehow upheld before the Lord by those aids wherewith he sustains our souls in affliction, among men, however, I was almost a noughtiness; so far at least as regards my discharge of duty, I appeared to myself quite as unfit for it as if I had been half dead. On the one hand, I was sadly grieved that a most excellent and faithful friend had been snatched away from me, a friend with whom I was so familiar, that none could be more closely united than we were;² on the other hand, there arose another cause of grief, when I saw the young man, your son, taken away in the very flower of his age, a youth of most excellent promise, whom I loved as a son, because, on his part, he shewed such respectful affection toward me as he would to another father. To this grievous sorrow was still added the heavy and distressing anxiety we experienced about those whom the Lord had spared to us. I heard that the whole household were scattered here and there. The danger of Malherbe caused me very great misery, as well as the cause of it, and warned me also as to the rest. I considered that it could not be otherwise but that my wife¹ must be very much dismayed. Your Charles, I assure you, was continually recurring to my thoughts; for in proportion as he was endowed with that goodness of disposition which had always appeared in him toward his brother as well as his preceptor, it never occurred to me to doubt but that he would be steeped in sorrow and soaked in tears. One single consideration somewhat relieved me, that he had my brother along with him, who, I hoped, would prove no small comfort in this calamity; even that, however, I could not reckon upon, when, at the same time, I recollected that both were in jeopardy, and neither of them was yet beyond the reach of danger. Thus, until the letter arrived which informed me that Malherbe was out of danger, and that Charles, my brother, wife, and the others were safe, I would have been all but utterly cast down, unless, as I have already mentioned, my heart was refreshed in prayer and private meditations, which are suggested by His word. These circumstances I mention on this account lest those exhortations may seem to you of less value, by which I now desire that you may take comfort, because you will consider it to be an easy matter to shew one's-self valiant in contending against another person's grief. I do not, however, boast here of firmness or fortitude in dealing with another's sorrow, but since it has been granted me, by the special goodness of God, that I should be in some degree either delivered or relieved by him, who, in the communication of his benefits, is alike common to me as to you: in so far as that is possible in a short letter, I desire to communicate to you the remedies I took advantage of, and those which were of greatest benefit. In this endeavour, however, the consideration of your sadness is so to be kept in view by me, that, at the same time, I shall remember that I have to do with a person of a very serious mind and of very constant and determined character; nor do I conceal from myself those refuges of defence by which you are regulated, and

¹ There is little known concerning M. de Richebourg. It appears from the letter of the Reformer that he had been for some years separated from his sons Charles and Louis, who had repaired to Strasbourg, probably to finish their education. The plague, which raged in Alsace, carried off Louis, the younger of the two brothers, and his preceptor, both tenderly beloved by Calvin, who, from Ratibison, where the sad intelligence had reached him, wrote this letter of Christian consolation to M. de Richebourg.

² Claude Peray, so much regretted by Calvin, was tutor to the sons of M. de Richebourg, and a very distinguished professor of Strasbourg.

¹ Idellette de Bure, the wife of Calvin, Antony, his brother, and Marie, his sister, had quitted Strasbourg, to avoid the infection of the plague.
kept on all occasions within the limits of patience and moderation. Neither shall I take advantage of those common topics of consolation which are customary among men, such as that you should not weep for your dead whom you had begotten subject to mortality, that you should shew forth in this sorrowful occurrence that firmness of mind which your excellent nature and disposition, expanded by the most elegant accomplishments, which your mature age, your varied experience, and which, to sum up all, your reputation and esteem among men require, that, after the fashion of the world, you may take consolation in the remembrance of your past life. In your case I set aside all exhortations of this kind, and others of the same description, and leave them to your own consideration. There is, most assuredly, one sure and certain, a never-failing source of consolation, in which you, and men like you, ought to acquiesce, because it flows from that inward feeling of piety which I know to abound in you; therefore, take special care to call to mind those thoughts which are taught us by the most excellent Master of all, and suggested to our understanding in the school of piety. It is not necessary at present that I should state these truths, which are all as familiar to you as to myself. Yet, notwithstanding, because of your singular piety, and that good-will which you express toward me, you will not, perhaps, be unwilling to recognize in my letter thoughts which have spontaneously occurred to your own mind at some other time. The son whom the Lord had lent you for a season he has taken away. There is no ground, therefore, for those silly and wicked complaints of foolish men; O blind death! O horrid fate! O implaceable daughters of destiny! O cruel fortune! The Lord who had lodged him here for a season, at this stage of his career has called him away. What the Lord has done, we must, at the same time, consider has not been done rashly, nor by chance, neither from having been impelled from without; but by that determinate counsel, whereby he not only foresee, decrees, and executes nothing but what is just and upright in itself, but also nothing but what is good and wholesome for us. Where justice and good judgment reign paramount, there it is impious to remonstrate. When, however, our own advantage is bound up with that goodness, how great would be the degree of ingratitude not to acquiesce, with a calm and well-ordered temper of mind, in whatever is the wish of our Father! Nevertheless, the faithful have a sufficient alleviation of their sorrows in the special providence of God, and the all-sufficiency of his provision, whatsoever may happen. For there is nothing which is more dispiriting to us than while we vex and annoy ourselves with this sort of questions—Why is it not otherwise with us? Why has it so happened that we came to this place? These questions would be well and suitably put, if there was somewhat in ourselves that needed reproof. But where there is no fault on our part, there is no room for this sort of complaints. It is God, therefore, who has sought back from you your son, whom he had committed to you to be educated, on the condition, that he might always be his own. And, therefore, he took him away, because it was both of advantage to him to leave this world, and by this bereavement to humble you, or to make trial of your patience. If you do not understand the advantage of this, without delay, first of all, setting aside every other object of consideration, ask of God that he may show you. Should it be his will to exercise you still farther, by concealing it from you, submit to that will, that you may become wiser than the weakness of your own understanding can ever attain to. In what regards your son, if you bethink yourself how difficult it is, in this most deplorable age, to maintain an upright course through life, you will judge him to be blessed, who, before encountering so many coming dangers which already were hovering over him, and to be encountered in his day and generation, was so early delivered from them all. He is like one who has set sail upon a stormy and tempestuous sea, and before he has been carried out into the deeps, gets in safety to the secure haven. Nor, indeed, is long life to be reckoned so great a benefit of God, that we can lose anything, when, separated only for the space of a few years, we are introduced to a life which is far better. Now, certainly, because the Lord himself, who is the Father of us all, had willed that Louis should be put among the children as a son of his adoption, he bestowed this benefit upon you, out of the multitude
of his mercies, that you might reap the excellent fruit of your careful education before his death; whence also you might know your interest in the blessing that belonged to you, "I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed." From his earliest boyhood, so far as his years allowed, he was grounded in the best studies, and had already made such a competent proficiency and progress, that we entertained great hope of him for the future. His manners and behaviour had met with the approval of all good men. If at any time he fell into error, he but not patiently suffered the word of admonition, but also that of reproof, and proved himself teachable and obedient, and willing to hearken to advice. At times, indeed, he was rather unruly, but never so far as to be obstinate or sullen. Those sallies, therefore, wherein he exceeded due bounds, were repressed with little trouble. That, however, which we rate most highly in him was, that he had drunk so largely into the principles of piety, that he had not merely a correct and true understanding of religion, but had also been faithfully imbued with the unfeigned fear and reverence of God. This exceeding kindness of God toward your offspring, ought with good reason to prevail more effectually with you in soothing the bitterness of death, than death itself has power to inflict grief upon you. With reference to my own feelings, if your sons had never come hither at all, I should never have grieved on account of the death of Claude and Louis. Never, however, shall this most crushing sorrow, which I suffer on account of both, so overcome me, as to reflect with grief upon that day on which they were driven hither by the hand of God to us, rather than led by any settled purpose of their own, when that friendship commenced which has not only continued undiminished to the last, but which, from day to day, was rather increased and confirmed. Whatever, therefore, may have been the kind or model of education they were in search of, I rejoice that they lived under the same roof with me. And since it was appointed them to die, I rejoice also that they died under my roof, where they rendered back their souls to God more composedly, and in greater circumstances of quiet, than if they had happened to die in those places where they would have experienced greater annoyance from the importunity of those by whom they ought to have been assisted, than from death itself. On the contrary, it was in the midst of pious exhortations, and while calling upon the name of the Lord, that these sainted spirits fled from the communion of their brethren here to the bosom of Christ. Nor would I desire now to be free from all sorrow at the cost of never having known them. Their memory will ever be sacred to me to the end of my days, and I am persuaded that it will also be sweet and comforting. But what advantage, you will say, is it to me to have had a son of so much promise, since he has been torn away from me in the first flower of his youth? As if, forsooth, Christ had not merited, by his death, the supreme dominion over the living and the dead! And if we belong to him, (as we ought,) why may he not exercise over us the power of life and of death? However brief, therefore, either in your opinion or in mine, the life of your son may have been, it ought to satisfy us that he has finished the course which the Lord had marked out for him. Moreover, we may not reckon him to have perished in the flower of his age, who had grown ripe in the sight of the Lord. For I consider all to have arrived at maturity who are summoned away by death; unless, perhaps, one would contend with him, as if he can snatch away any one before his time. This, indeed, holds true of every one; but in regard to Louis, it is yet more certain on another and more peculiar ground. For he had arrived at that age when, by true evidences, he could prove himself a member of the body of Christ: having put forth this fruit, he was taken from us and transplanted. Yes, instead of this transient and vanishing shadow of life, he has regained the real immortality of being. Nor can you consider yourself to have lost him, whom you will recover in the blessed resurrection in the kingdom of God. For they had both so lived and so died, that I cannot doubt but they are now with the Lord; let us, therefore, press forward toward this goal which they have reached. There can be no doubt but that Christ will bind together both them and us in the same inseparable society, in that incomparable participation of his own glory. Beware, therefore, that you do not lament your son as lost, whom you acknowledge to be preserved by the Lord,
that he may remain yours for ever, who, at the pleasure of his own will, lent him to you only for a season. Nor will you derive small consolation from this consideration, if you only weigh carefully what is left to you. Charles survives to you, of whom we all entertain this sentiment, that there is not one of us who does not desire that he might have such a son. Do not suppose that these expressions are only intended for your hearing, or that there is exaggeration here, in order to bespeak your favour. This is no more my habit than it is my disposition. I therefore express what are my real sentiments, and what I would say among strangers, that the young man excels, in the first place, in singular piety and in the true fear of God, which is the beginning and the end of all wisdom; then in the kindliness of his disposition, in gentleness of manner, and in rare modesty and continence. Nor do I assign these virtues to him upon mere rumour or hearsay; for I have always been anxious upon this head, and kept close observation of his particular disposition. During the lifetime of both the brothers, I have remarked this distinction between them: Louis excelled in quickness of apprehension, but Charles, in solid judgment and intelligence, was much in advance of his brother. The deceased brother was more ready in bringing into play what he had read or heard; the other is slower, but also surer. The one was more ready and quick in mastering the various arts as well as in the active business of life; the other more considerate and more steady: his constitution of body, also, indicated as much. Louis, however, as he was of a more sanguine temperament, was also more lively and cheerful. Charles, who has somewhat of melancholy in his disposition, is not so easily drawn out of himself. He was always the more modest and courteous of the two, which distinguished him to such a degree, that he could subdue his brother's impetuosity by the forbearance which he exercised. In moderation, in gravity like that of manhood, and in a certain equability of demeanour, in these points he was far the superior. You will, therefore, yourself be judge how far the possessing such a son ought to avail for taking off the pain of the bereavement wherewith the Lord has now afflicted you, and you will then conclude, that even on this account you must not be ungrateful to God. It is difficult, notwithstanding, you will say, so to shake off or suppress the love of a father, as not to experience grief on occasion of the loss of a son. Neither do I insist upon your laying aside all grief. Nor, in the school of Christ, do we learn any such philosophy as requires us to put off that common humanity with which God has endowed us, that, being men, we should be turned into stones. These considerations reach only so far as this, that you do set bounds, and, as it were, temper even your most reasonable sadness; that, having shed those tears which were due to nature and to fatherly affection, you by no means give way to senseless wailing. Nor do I by any means interfere because I am distrustful of your prudence, firmness, or high-mindedness; but only lest I might here be wanting and come short in my duty to you. Although, however, this letter shall be superfluous, (which I can suppose,) you will nevertheless take in good part, because of your distinguished and kindly courtesy, this my perhaps over-anxious importunity,—pardonable, however, notwithstanding, because it proceeds from my unbounded affection towards you. Moreover, I have requested Melanchthon and Bucer that they would also add their letters to mine, because I entertained the hope that it would not be unacceptable that they too should afford some evidence of their good will toward you. Adieu, most distinguished sir, and my much respected in the Lord. May Christ the Lord keep you and your family, and direct you all with his own Spirit, until you may arrive where Louis and Claude have gone before.

[Calvin's Let. Corresp. Opera, tom. ix. p. 175.]

LX.—To Farel.

Affliction of Calvin—news of the Diet of Ratisbon—appointment of the theologians charged with the representation of the two parties—their reception by the Emperor—portrait of Julius Pflug, of Gropper, and of Eck.

RATISBON, 26th April 1541.

My last letter will have given you to understand clearly enough the state of affliction in which I then was. If on that