

# HISTORY of the CHRISTIAN CHURCH

BY

PHILIP SCHAFF, D.D., LL.D.

## HISTORY

OF

## THE SWISS REFORMATION IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME 1

1893AD

WILLIAM FAREL

Two years after the political emancipation of Geneva from the yoke of Savoy, Bern embraced the Protestant Reformation (1528), and at once exerted her political and moral influence for the introduction of the new religion into the neighboring French territory over which she had acquired control. She found three evangelists ready for this work,—one a native of Vaud, and two fugitive Frenchmen. The city of Freiburg, the Duke of Savoy, Charles V., and the pope endeavored to prevent the progress of heresy, but in vain.

The pioneer of Protestantism in Western Switzerland is William Farel. He was a travelling evangelist, always in motion, incessant in labors, a man full of faith and fire, as bold and fearless as Luther and far more radical, but without his genius. He is called the Elijah of the French Reformation, and “the scourge of the priests.” Once an ardent papist, he became as ardent a Protestant, and looked hereafter only at the dark side, the prevailing corruptions and abuses of Romanism. He hated the pope as the veritable Antichrist, the mass as idolatry, pictures and relics as heathen idols which must be destroyed like the idols of the Canaanites. Without a regular ordination, he felt himself divinely called, like a prophet of old, to break down idolatry and to clear the way for the spiritual worship of God according to his own revealed word. He was a born fighter; he came, not to bring peace, but the sword. He had to deal with priests who carried firearms and clubs under their frocks,

and he fought them with the sword of the word and the spirit. Once he was fired at, but the gun burst, and, turning round, he said, "I am not afraid of your shots." He never used violence himself, except in language. He had an indomitable will and power of endurance. Persecution and violence only stimulated him to greater exertions. His outward appearance was not prepossessing: he was small and feeble, with a pale but sunburnt face, narrow forehead, red and ill-combed beard, fiery eyes, and an expressive mouth.

Farel had some of the best qualities of an orator: a sonorous and stentorian voice, appropriate gesture, fluency of speech, and intense earnestness, which always commands attention and often produces conviction. His contemporaries speak of the thunders of his eloquence and of his transporting prayers. "*Tua illa fulgura,*" writes Calvin. "*Nemo tonuit fortius,*" says Beza. His sermons were extemporized, and have not come down to us. Their power lay in the oral delivery. We may compare him to Whitefield, who was likewise a travelling evangelist, endowed with the magnetism of living oratory. In Beza's opinion, Calvin was the most learned, Farel the most forcible, Viret the most gentle preacher of that age.<sup>1</sup>

The chief defect of Farel was his want of moderation and discretion. He was an iconoclast. His violence provoked unnecessary opposition, and often did more harm than good. Oecolampadius praised his zeal, but besought him to be also moderate and gentle. "Your mission," he wrote to him, "is to evangelize, not to curse. Prove yourself to be an evangelist, not a tyrannical legislator. Men want to be led, not driven." Zwingli, shortly before his death, exhorted him not to expose himself rashly, but to reserve himself for the further service of the Lord.

Farel's work was destructive rather than constructive. He could pull down, but not build up. He was a conqueror, but not an organizer of his conquests; a man of action, not a man of letters; an intrepid preacher, not a theologian. He felt his defects, and handed his work over to the mighty genius of his younger friend Calvin. In the spirit of genuine humility and self-denial, he was willing to decrease that Calvin might increase. This is the finest trait in his character.<sup>2</sup>

Guillaume Farel, the oldest of seven children of a poor but noble family, was born in the year 1489 (five years after Luther and Zwingli, twenty years before Calvin) at Gap, a small town in the alps of Dauphine in the south-east of France, where the religious views of the Waldenses were once widely spread. He inherited the blind faith of his parents, and doubted nothing. He made with them, as he remembered in his old age, a pilgrimage to a wonder-working cross which was believed to be taken from the cross of our Lord. He shared in the superstitious veneration of pictures and relics, and bowed before the authority of monks and priests. He was, as he said, more popish than popery.

At the same time he had a great thirst for knowledge, and was sent to school at Paris. Here he studied the ancient languages (even Hebrew), philosophy, and theology. His principal teacher, Jacques Le Fèvre d'Étaples (Faber Stapulensis, 1455-1536), the pioneer of the Reformation in France and translator of the Scriptures, introduced him into the knowledge of Paul's Epistles and the doctrine of justification by faith, and prophetically told him, already in 1512: "My son, God will renew the world, and you will witness

it.”<sup>3</sup> Farel acquired the degree of Master of Arts (January, 1517), and was appointed teacher at the college of Cardinal Le Moine.

The influence of Le Fèvre and the study of the Bible brought him gradually to the conviction that salvation can be found only in Christ, that the word of God is the only rule of faith, and that the Roman traditions and rites are inventions of man. He was amazed that he could find in the New Testament no trace of the pope, of the hierarchy, of indulgences, of purgatory, of the mass, of seven sacraments, of sacerdotal celibacy, of the worship of Mary and the saints. Le Fèvre, being charged with heresy by the Sorbonne, retired in 1521 to his friend William Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux, who was convinced of the necessity of a reformation within the Catholic Church, without separation from Rome.<sup>4</sup> There he translated the New Testament into French, which was published in 1523 without his name (almost simultaneously with Luther’s German New Testament). Several of his pupils, Farel, Gerard, Roussel, Michel d’Arande, followed him to Meaux, and were authorized by Briçonnet to preach in his diocese. Margaret of Valois, sister of King Francis I. (then Duchess of Alençon, afterwards Queen of Navarre), patronized the reformers and also the freethinkers. But Farel was too radical for the mild bishop, and forbidden to preach, April 12, 1523. He went to Gap and made some converts, including four of his brothers; but the people found his doctrine “very strange,” and drove him away. There was no safety for him anywhere in France, which then began seriously to persecute the Protestants.

Farel fled to Basel, and was hospitably received by Oecolampadius. At his suggestion he held a public disputation in Latin on thirteen theses, in which he asserted the perfection of the Scriptures, Christian liberty, the duty of pastors to preach the Gospel, the doctrine of justification by faith, and denounced images, fasting, celibacy, and Jewish ceremonies (Feb. 23, 1524).<sup>5</sup> The disputation was successful, and led to the conversion of the Franciscan monk Pellican, a distinguished Greek and Hebrew scholar, who afterwards became professor at Zurich. He also delivered public lectures and sermons. Oecolampadius wrote to Luther that Farel was a snatch for the Sorbonne.<sup>6</sup> Erasmus, whom Farel imprudently charged with cowardice and called a Balaam, regarded him as a dangerous disturber of the peace,<sup>7</sup> and the Council (probably at the advice of Erasmus) expelled him from the city.

Farel now spent about a year in Strassburg with Bucer and Capito. Before he went there he made a brief visit to Zurich, Schaffhausen, and Constance, and became acquainted with Zwingli, Myconius, and Grebel. He had a letter of commendation to Luther from Oecolampadius, but it is not likely that he went to Wittenberg, since there is no allusion to it either in his or in Luther’s letters. At the request of Ulrich, Duke of Wurtemberg, he preached in Mompelgard (Montbeliard), and roused a fierce opposition, which forced him soon to return to Strassburg. Here he found Le Fevre and other friends from Meaux, whom the persecution had forced to flee.

In 1526 Farel was again in Switzerland, and settled for a while, at the advice of Haller, as school teacher under the name of Guillaume Ursinus (with reference to Bern, the city of bears), at Aigle (AElen)<sup>8</sup> in the Pays de Vaud on the borders of Valais, subject to Bern.

He attended the Synod in Bern, January, 1528, which decided the victory of the Reformation, and received a commission from that city to preach in all the districts under its control (March 8, 1528). He accordingly labored as a

sort of missionary bishop at Murat (Murten), Lausanne, Neuchâtel, Valangin, Yverdon, Biel (Bienne), in the Munster valley, at Orbe, Avenche, St. Blaise, Grandson, and other places. He turned every stump and stone into a pulpit, every house, street, and market-place into a church; provoked the wrath of monks, priests, and bigoted women; was abused, called "heretic" and "devil," insulted, spit upon, and more than once threatened with death. An attempt to poison him failed. Wherever he went he stirred up all the forces of the people, and made them take sides for or against the new gospel.

His arrival in Neuchâtel (December, 1529) marks an epoch in its history. In spite of violent opposition, he succeeded in introducing the Reformation in the city and neighboring villages. He afterwards returned to Neuchâtel, where he finished his course.<sup>9</sup> Robert Olivetan, Calvin's cousin, published the first edition of his French translation of the Bible at Neuchâtel in 1535. Farel had urged him to do this work. It is the basis of the numerous French translations made since that time.

In 1532 Farel with his friend Saunier visited the Waldenses in Piedmont at the request of Georg Morel and Peter Masson, two Waldensian preachers, who were returning from a visit to Strassburg and the Reformed Churches of Switzerland. He attended the Synod which met at Chanforans in the valley of Angrogne, Sept. 12, 1532, and resolved to adopt the doctrines of the Reformation. He advised them to establish schools. He afterwards collected money for them and sent them four teachers, one of whom was Robert Olivetan, who was at that time private tutor at Geneva. This is the beginning of the fraternal relations between the Waldenses and the Reformed Churches which continue to this day.

#### *61. Farel at Geneva. First Act of the Reformation (1535AD).*

On their return from Piedmont, Farel and Saunier stopped at Geneva, Oct. 2, 1532. Zwingli had previously directed the attention of Farel to that city as an important field for the Reformation. Olivetan was there to receive them.

The day after their arrival the evangelists were visited by a number of distinguished citizens of the Huguenot party, among whom was Ami Perrin, one of the most ardent promoters of the Reformation, and afterwards one of the chief opponents of Calvin. They explained to them from the open Bible the Protestant doctrines, which would complete and consolidate the political freedom recently achieved. They stirred up a great commotion. The Council was alarmed, and ordered them to leave the city. Farel declared that he was no trumpet of sedition, but a preacher of the truth, for which he was ready to die. He showed credentials from Bern, which made an impression. He was also summoned to the Episcopal Council in the house of the Abbe de Beaumont, the vicar-general of the diocese. He was treated with insolence. "Come thou, filthy devil," said one of the canons, art thou baptized? Who invited you hither? Who gave you authority to preach?" Farel replied with dignity: "I have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and am not a devil. I go about preaching Christ, who died for our sins and rose for our justification. Whoever believes in him will be saved; unbelievers will be lost. I am sent by God as a messenger of Christ, and am bound to preach him to all who will hear me. I am ready to dispute with you, and to

give an account of my faith and ministry. Elijah said to King Ahab, 'It is thou, and not I, who disturbest Israel.' So I say, it is you and yours, who trouble the world by your traditions, your human inventions, and your dissolute lives." The priests had no intention to enter into a discussion; they knew and confessed, "If we argue, our trade is gone." One of the canons exclaimed: "He has blasphemed; we need no further evidence; he deserves to die." Farel replied: "Speak the words of God, and not of Caiaphas." Hereupon the whole assembly shouted: "Away with him to the Rhone! Kill the Lutheran dog!" He was reviled, beaten, and shot at. One of the syndics interposed for his protection. He was ordered by the Episcopal Council to leave Geneva within three hours.

He escaped with difficulty the fury of the priests, who pursued him with clubs. He was covered with spittle and bruises. Some Huguenots came to his defence, and accompanied him and Saunier in a boat across the lake to a place between Morges and Lausanne. At Orbe, Farel found Antoine Froment, a native of Dauphine, and prevailed on him to go to Geneva as evangelist and a teacher of children (November, 1532); but he was also obliged to flee.

In this critical condition the Roman party, supported by Freiburg, called to their aid Guy Furbity, a learned Dominican doctor of the Sorbonne. He preached during advent, 1533, against the Protestant heresy with unmeasured violence. In Jan. 1, 1534, the bishop forbade all preaching without his permission.

Farel returned under the protection of Bern, and held a public disputation with Furbity, Jan. 29, 1534, in the presence of the Great and Small Councils and the delegates of Bern. He could not answer all his objections, but he denied the right of the Church to impose ordinances which were not authorized by the Scriptures, and defended the position that Christ was the only head of the Church. He used the occasion to explain the Protestant doctrines, and to attack the Roman hierarchy. Christ and the Holy Spirit, he said, are not with the pope, but with those whom he persecutes. The disputation lasted several days, and ended in a partial victory for Farel. Unable to argue from the Scriptures, Furbity confessed: "What I preached I cannot prove from the Bible; I have learned it from the Summa of St. Thomas"; but he repeated in the pulpit of St. Peter's his charges against the heretics, Feb. 15, and was put in prison for several years.

Farel continued to preach in private houses. On March 1, when a monk, Francis Coutelier, attacked the Reformation, he ascended the pulpit to refute him. This was his first public sermon in Geneva. The Freiburgers protested against these proceedings, and withdrew from the coburghery (April 12). The bishop pronounced the ban over the city (April 30); the Duke of Savoy threatened war. But Bern stood by Geneva, and under her powerful protection, Farel, Viret, and Froment vigorously pushed the Reformation, though not without much violence.

The priests, monks, and nuns gradually left the city, and the bishop transferred his see to Annecy, an asylum prepared by the Duke of Savoy. Sister Jeanne de Jussie, one of the nuns of St. Claire, has left us a lively and naive account of their departure to Annecy. "It was a piteous thing," she says, "to see this holy company in such a plight, so overcome with fatigue and grief that several swooned by the way. It was rainy weather, and all were obliged

to walk through muddy roads, except four poor invalids who were in a carriage. There were six poor old women who had taken their vows more than sixteen years before. Two of these, who were past sixty-six, and had never seen anything of the world, fainted away repeatedly. They could not bear the wind; and when they saw the cattle in the fields, they took the cows for bears, and the long-wooled sheep for ravaging wolves. They who met them were so overcome with compassion that they could not speak a word. And though our mother, the vicarress, had supplied them all with good shoes to save their feet, the greater number could not walk in them, but hung them at their waists. And so they walked from five o'clock in the morning, when they left Geneva, till near midnight, when they got to St. Julien, which is only a little league off." It took the nuns fifteen hours to go a short league. The next day (Aug. 29) they reached Annecy under the ringing of all the bells of the city, and found rest in the monastery of the Holy Cross. The good sister Jussie saw in the Reformation a just punishment of the unfaithful clergy. "Ah," she said, "the prelates and churchmen did not observe their vows at this time, but squandered dissolutely the ecclesiastical property, keeping women in adultery and lubricity, and awakening the anger of God, which brought divine judgment on them."<sup>10</sup>

In Aug. 27, 1535, the Great Council of Two Hundred issued an edict of the Reformation, which was followed by another, May 21, 1536. The mass was abolished and forbidden, images and relics were removed from the churches. The citizens pledged themselves by an oath to live according to the precepts of the Gospel. A school was established for the elementary religious education of the young at the Convent de Rive, under the direction of Saurier. Out of it grew, afterwards, the college and academy of Calvin. A general hospital was founded at St. Claire, and endowed with the revenues of old Catholic hospitals. The bishop's palace was converted into a prison. Four ministers and two deacons were appointed with fixed salaries payable out of the ecclesiastical revenues. Daily sermons were introduced at St. Pierre and St. Gervais; the communion after the simple solemn fashion of Zurich was to be celebrated four times a year; baptism might be administered on any day, but only in the church, and by a minister. All shops were to be closed on Sunday. A strict discipline, which extended even to the headdress of brides, began to be introduced.

This was the first act in the history of the Reformation of Geneva. It was the work of Farel, but only preparatory to the more important work of Calvin. The people were anxious to get rid of the rule of Savoy and the bishop, but had no conception of evangelical religion, and would not submit to discipline. They mistook freedom for license. They were in danger of falling into the opposite extreme of disorder and confusion.

This was the state of things when Calvin arrived at Geneva in the summer of 1536, and was urged by Farel to assume the great task of building a new Church on the ruins of the old. Although twenty years older, he assumed willingly a subordinate position. He labored for a while as Calvin's colleague, and was banished with him from Geneva, because they demanded submission to a confession of faith and a rigorous discipline. Calvin went to Strassburg. Farel accepted a call as pastor to Neuchâtel (July, 1538), the city where he had labored before.

## 62. *The Last Labors of Farel.*

For the remaining twenty-seven years of his life, Farel remained chief pastor at Neuchâtel, and built up the Protestant Church in connection with Fabri, his colleague. He tried to introduce a severe discipline, by which he offended many of the new converts, and even his friends in Bern; but Fabri favored a milder course.

From Neuchâtel Farel, following his missionary impulse, made preaching excursions to Geneva, Strassburg, and Metz, in Lorraine. At Metz he preached in the cemetery of the Dominicans, while the monks sounded all the bells to drown his voice. He accompanied Calvin to Zurich to bring about the Consensus Tigurinus with the Zwinglians (1549). He followed Servetus to the stake (Oct. 27, 1553), and exhorted him in vain to renounce his errors. He collected money for the refugees of Locarno, and sent letters of comfort to his persecuted brethren in France. He made two visits to Germany (1557) to urge upon the German princes an active intercession in behalf of the Waldenses and French Protestants, but without effect. In December, 1558, when already sixty-nine years of age, he married, against the advice of his friends, a poor maiden, who had fled with her widowed mother from France to Neuchâtel.<sup>11</sup> Calvin was much annoyed by this indiscretion, but besought the preachers of that city to bear with patience the folly of the old bachelor. The marriage did not cool Farel's zeal. In 1559 he visited the French refugees in Alsace and Lorraine. In November, 1561, he accepted an invitation to Gap, his birthplace, and ventured to preach in public, notwithstanding the royal prohibition, to the large number of his fellow-citizens who had become Protestants.

Shortly before his death Calvin informed him of his illness, May 2, 1564, in the last letter from his pen: "Farewell, my best and truest brother! And since it is God's will that you remain behind me in the world, live mindful of our friendship, which as it was useful to the Church of God, so the fruit of it awaits us in heaven. Pray do not fatigue yourself on my account. It is with difficulty that I draw my breath, and I expect that every moment will be the last. It is enough that I live and die for Christ, who is the reward of his followers both in life and in death. Again, farewell with the brethren."<sup>12</sup> Farel, notwithstanding the infirmity of old age, travelled to Geneva, and paid his friend a touching farewell visit, but returned home before his death. He wrote to Fabri: "Would I could die for him! What a beautiful course has he happily finished. God grant that we may thus finish our course according to the grace that he has given us."

His last journey was a farewell visit to the Protestants at Metz, who received him with open arms, and were exceedingly comforted by his presence (May, 1565). He preached with the fire of his youth. Soon after his return to Neuchâtel, he died peacefully, Sept. 13, 1565, seventy-six years old. The friends who visited him in his last days were deeply impressed with his heroic steadfastness and hopefulness. He was poor and disinterested, like all the Reformers.<sup>13</sup> A monument was erected to him at Neuchâtel, May 4, 1876. The writings of Farel are polemical and practical tracts for the times, mostly in French.<sup>14</sup>

## FOOTNOTES

1 Beza, in his *Icones*, thus describes Farel's best qualities: "*Hic enint ille est qui nullis difficultatibus fractus, nullis minis, convitiis, verberibus denique inflictis territus, Mombelgardenses, Neoconienses, Lausanenses, Aquileienses, Genevenses denique Christo lucrificet. Fuit enim in hoc homine proeter pietatem, doctrinam, vitae innocentiam, eximiainque modestiam, singularis quaedam animi pcesentia, ingenium acre, sermo vehementiae plenus, ut tonare potius quam loqui videretur: ardorque denique tantus in precando, ut audientes quasi in coelum usque subveheret.*" And he compares Calvin, Farel, and Viret in these verses (in 1568):—

*“ Gallica mirata est Calvinum ecclesia nuper,  
Quo nemo docuit doctius.  
Est quoque to nuper mirata, Farelle, tonantem,  
Quo memo tonuit fortius.  
Et miratur adhuc fundentem mella Viretum,  
Quo nemo fatur dulcius.  
Scilicet ant tribes his servabere testibus olim,  
Ant interibis Gallia.”*

2 "*L'homme du midi [Farel] etait fait pour conquerir; l'homme du nord [Calvin] pour conserver et discipliner la conquete. Farel en eut le sentiment si distinct, qu'il s'effaçà spontanement devant Calvin le jour où il le contraignit par les 'tonnerres' de so parole de demeurer à Genève, qui avait besoin de son génie.*" Philippe Godet, *Hist. litter. de la Suisse française*, p. 51.

3 "*Mon fils, Dieu renouvellera le monde et to en seras le témoin.*" Herminjard, I. 5, note. Compare the passage there quoted from Le Févre's work on St. Paul.

4 Herminjard (I. 3) begins his *Correspondance des Ref.* with a letter of Le Févre to Briçonnet, Dec. 15, 1512, in which he dedicated to him his Commentary on the Epistles of Paul.

5 Herminjard (I. 193-195) gives the theses from the Archives of Zurich. The first is the most characteristic: "*Absolutissimam nobis praescripsit Christus vivendi regulam, cui nec addere licet, nec detrahare.*" Oecolampadius served as interpreter, since Farel's French pronunciation of Latin made it difficult to understand him.

6 "*Nimirum instructus ad totam Sorbonicam affligendam, si non et perdendam.*" Letter of May 15, 1524, in Herminjard, I. 215.

7 He described him in a letter to the official of Besançon, 1524: "*Nihil vidi unquam mendacius, virulentius aut seditiosius.*" Quite natural from his standpoint. The two characters had no points of contact.

8 In August, 1526, Bucer addressed him, "*Ursinus, Aelae episcopus.*" Herminjard, I. 461.

9 For a graphic account of his labors in Neuchâtel, see Vuillemin's *Le Chroniqueur*, pp. 86 sqq., and F. Godet, *Histoire de la réformation et du refuge dans le pays de Neuchatel* (1859), pp. 69-190.

10 *Le commencement de l'heresie en Genève.* Grenus, *Fragments historiques*, pp. 199-208; *Le Chroniqueur*, 147-150. Ruchat (111. 383, ed. Vulliemin) doubts the simplicity of these good sisters, and suspects them of occasional communication with the Franciscans through subterranean passages: *Il y a pourtant quelque lieu de douter si ces religieuses etaient aussi simples que la soeur de Jussi voudrait nous le faire accroire. Les chemins souterrains qu'on decouvrit apres leur depart sous leur convent (et qui conduissaient à celui des Cordeliers qui etait a quelques pas de là, donnent*

*tout lieu de soupçonner qu'elles recevaient de temps en temps des visites de ces bons frères, et qu'ainsi elles n'étaient pas tant novices dans les affaires du monde.*"

11 Six years afterwards he became the father of a son, his only child, who survived him three years. John Knox surpassed him in matrimonial enterprise: he married, as a widower of fifty-eight, a Scotch lass of sixteen, of royal name and blood (Margaret Stuart), who bore him three daughters, and two years after his death (1572) contracted a second marriage. If Erasmus had lived, he might have pointed to these examples in confirmation of his witticisms on the marriages of Luther and Oecolampadius.

12 Calvin, *Opera*, x x . 302, where this epistola is called "*ultima omnium et vale dictoria*."

13 *La France Prot.*, VI. 409: "*Toute sa succession se monta à 120 livres, preuve de son entière désintéressement.*" Godet, l.c., p. 185: "*Calvin mourant ne laissa que 125 écus de fortune à ses héritiers. Le petit trésor de Farel trouve après sa mort se montait à 120 livres du pays.*"

14 See a list of 18 in Schmidt, l.c., p. 38; a more complete one (24) in *La France Protest.*, VI. 410-414. Herminjard, in the 7 vols. of his *Correspond. des Réf.*, gives 107 of his letters, and 242 letters addressed to him.