

Calvin's Conduct

ecclesiasticalresearches.com

Servetus was arrested by the Roman Catholic authorities at Vienne, and it is impossible to doubt that the information on which this was done was supplied by Calvin, though not in his own name. The letters written by Servetus to Calvin twenty-five years before were produced at the trial. But the trial proved inconclusive, Servetus' escape from prison being connived at by Roman Catholic friends.

His fate led him to Geneva, where he was arrested on Calvin's information, and the capital charge of heresy brought against him by a person in Calvin's service. Calvin himself afterwards undertook the office of prosecutor. The details of the trial before the Council at Geneva may be read in vol. viii. of the works of the Reformer, and in the book, *Servetus and Calvin*, by R. Willis, M.D. (1877), there is a full discussion.

The trial is dreadful reading,—not so much on account of Servetus, who, after the hopes which Calvin's opponents at first encouraged in him gave way, bore himself nobly and submitted with great courage to his horrible fate; it is Calvin whose conduct it is hard to understand. It is true that he did not pronounce the sentence on Servetus that he was to be burned.

The magistrates did that, and refused the milder form of execution Calvin proposed. But the magistrates were necessarily guided in a case of heresy by the opinions of the ministers, the experts in such a question, and of the ministers Calvin was chief and leader.

A word from him and the capital charge would have been dropped, his influence could have secured that at Geneva, or in the four neighbouring Cantons which Geneva consulted. That word was never spoken; instead we find him writing to friends in the four Cantons that no leniency was to be shown.

(A Study of Calvin and Other Papers by Allan Menzies, London: Macmillan and Co., e-book, 1918, 188-189, Paragraph Structure Modified)