

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY.*

BY THE REV. N. BURWASH, S.T.D.

Chancellor of Victoria University.

There is no doubt that the study of systematic theology has received both a new impulse and a new method in recent years. For some time the wonderful advance of exegetical studies and the development of biblical and historical theology had either thrown the formal systematic theology into the background, or reduced it to a mere orderly exposition of dogmatics. The scholastic spirit which sought with intense earnestness for the rational ground and the logical interdependence of the elements of Christian doctrine had given place to the inductive investigation of facts, and the tracing of their historical evolution.

By these methods, at least two new departments of theological science have grown up largely within this century. But, in addition to this, the new methods have furnished a new basis and new materials from which to work out afresh, and with far more success than of old, a system of religious truth. A systematic theology, i.e., a theory of religion, which, by the way, embraces all things the Church and the Christian world will have. Our intellectual nature is unsatisfied until in some way we have fashioned for ourselves a theory, however crude, of the how and why of everything in which we are interested.

Dr. Gerhart begins his work with a thoroughly masterly conception of the task of the systematic theologian. Systematic theology is to him no mere scholastic concatenation of biblical, historical and dogmatic theology. It has a distinct purpose and character of its own. It makes use of each of the others, but only as furnishing material for its own distinctive structure; and that structure is not a mere patchwork, but is built according to its own formative idea, a perfect unity in itself.

The principle of theology our author states in these words: "It is necessary that Christian truth, as taught in the

New Testament and adjusted to the demands of apostolic times, be translated into modes of apprehension adjusted to the changed social and scientific needs and to the new capacities of each successive age." Again, "A living Church cannot but grow intensively and extensively; and a living theology cannot but grow in clearness, consistency and wealth of divine knowledge. But the genuine progress of theology will always include the reciprocal action of two factors—the objective force of the written Word and the scientific capacities of the Church."

Following up this idea his object is to present the whole field of Christian truth in terms which satisfy the scientific mind and methods of our day. This will of course include the scientific interpretation of the sources, the scientific analysis of the material, as well as its scientific synthesis or construction, in systematic form. How far our author has succeeded in this task will appear from a few examples.

A Methodist in examining a system of theology emanating from a Calvinistic branch of the Church, naturally turns to the doctrine which lies at the foundation of Calvinism, the sovereignty of God. This the author recognizes as the fundamental and formative doctrine of the system. It is stated as follows: "The decretal system begins with the sovereign will of God. God governs man and the universe according to an eternal unconditional decree. The decree is twofold, negative and positive. A definite number of angels and men are chosen unto life eternal, all others are passed by. The Son of God becomes man and performs the work of redemption to the end that the elect may be saved from condemnation. The incarnation becomes an expedient of divine wisdom; the chief purpose of Christianity is to effect reconciliation between the elect and God by divine agencies." Of this system our author says: "Constructing a theological system from this point of view God is falsely exalted above man, and man is relegated to a plane of existence unworthy of His divine imageship." The opposite system he defines as follows:

Arminius, "against the false predominance of the divine will, asserted the rights of man." "Overlooking the impor-

* "Institutes of the Christian Religion." By Emmanuel J. Gerhart, D.D., LL.D., Professor of Systematic Theology in the Seminary of the Reformed Church, Lancaster, Pa. New York, London and Toronto: Funk & Wagnalls Company. Toronto: William Briggs. Two volumes, 8vo, pp. xxvii-754; pp. xxvi-938. Price, \$3.00 each.