

THE NEW HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.*

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In a recent number we had occasion to notice the publication of the first volume of a translation of Harnack's great work on the History of Christian Dogma, by Roberts Brothers, Boston. We found there a new method of treatment of this important field of Theological Science, the great dogmas of the Church traced to their formative sources in the intellectual and spiritual forces of the age. In this treatment the great centres of interest are the important elements of our creeds, whether these were definitely formulated by ecclesiastical authority or gradually taken up by a tacit, general consent. Dr. Fisher has taken up his work on a different plan. He regards the development of the Christian Theology as a progressive and almost unbroken movement through the centuries. The great forces which produce this movement and the contributing streams which from time to time swell its current are not ignored, but they are not to him the great centre of interest. That lies in the movement itself and especially in the great master-minds who gather up into their own spiritual life, and sometimes anticipate and always express, the thought of their age. In pursuance of this plan the author avoids the merely topical division of his subject-matter or relegates it to a subordinate place. His work is thus not the history of individual doctrines, nor yet that of great dogmatic formularies, but is rather a picture of the entire movement of Christian thought from age to age in the theological field. This movement finds expression, and at the same time a living, personal interest, in the great names which successively rise before us.

Beginning with Justin Martyr and ending with great names still living, we have a continuous panorama of great thinkers and their great works and thoughts, a history of theology rather than of doctrine or dogma. Anyone familiar with the previous work of Prof.

Fisher will easily anticipate our judgment that the work is well done. The field covered in these five hundred pages is a very wide one. Other writers have covered it in two or three large octavos. Discriminating summaries, accurate but epitomized statements are of course absolutely necessary in such a work as the student finds here in his hands. The author must have faced at every turn the difficult problem of combining justice and living interest with brevity. We know of no predecessor who has been as successful in this as Prof. Fisher. At every point where we have tested the work it seems to us to be remarkably clear, full, accurate, discriminating and impartial in its presentation. It would, of course, be too much to expect that any man would be equally successful in every part of so wide a field. The patristic, the scholastic, the Reformation, and the modern movements of Christian thought are each so vast in extent that a life-time might easily be spent in the perfect mastery of any one of them. And yet, in each of these periods, we find tempting examples of our author's genius for historical work. Such are the presentations of the work of Justin Martyr and of Origen of the East, and that of Augustine in the West. These presentations are not limited to one particular doctrine. They are associated with these names, such as the *Logos*, or the Sonship, or the Doctrine of Sin. The men rather stand before us as the embodiment of great spiritual forces in this theological movement, and we see the working of these forces in many dogmatic topics. In Justin we see the beginning of theology as a necessity of the Church's life. In Origen we see the first great attempt to make theology a universal philosophy. In Augustine we have the first application of profound psychological insight to the work of theological science. The particular opinions of each of these great men, of course, appear defective. A schoolboy of to-day may know more than did Sir Isaac Newton. But we learn to estimate the magnitude of the men and the importance of their work by the new methods and forces which they called into action. They were, in some sense, creators of movements and periods in this history.

* International Theological Library. History of Christian Doctrine. By GEORGE PARK FISHER, D.D., LL.D., Yale University. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896. Toronto: William Briggs. Price, \$2.50.