

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY:

A LECTURE.

GENTLEMEN, STUDENTS OF KNOX COLLEGE,—

The literature of our day is flooded with all kinds of assaults against Christian doctrine. Not only in books professedly theological or philosophical, but in the lighter works of poetry and fiction, we find continual protests against the idea that Christianity contains any body or system of positive truths—the belief of which is essential to the Christian faith—the denial of which is a negation of Christianity. Dogma is used as a term of reproach, as though it were equivalent to dogmatism in the justly offensive sense in which that word is popularly used. Dogmatism signifies that disposition or habit of mind which overvalues the individual's own powers, depreciates the opinions of others, and seeks arrogantly to force assent to personal opinions as indisputably true, by a groundless assumption of authority. Dogma is to be understood not as meaning merely a doctrinal notion; it signifies a positive truth positively asserted, in opposition to an opinion or speculation. In theology it signifies a revealed truth—a statement which truly expresses the mind of God in His Word. The claim to authority does not rest upon the use of dogmatic words—upon the positiveness of the statement, but upon the proof of the authority whence it is derived. A statement may in its form be dogmatic, while devoid of the authority out of which alone dogma can properly spring; but every doctrine having a divine authority must have a dogmatic form. We claim therefore for the truths which are declared and attested by the Word of God, and which are capable of definite statement, that they are positive and authoritative, not as matters of individual opinion, but as revealed truths bearing the stamp of Divine infallibility.