GULIELMI AMESII THEOLOGIÆ MEDULLÆ. LIBER PRIMUS

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GULIELMI AMESII

THEOLOGIÆ MEDULLÆ.

Liber Primus.

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PREFACE TO THIS EDITION.

SOME account of the author of the following treatise may form a suitable introduction to this new edition of it; for his personal character and life were such as to commend his writings to the favourable attention of those interested in evangelical religion and theology. Though known exclusively as a Latin writer, William Ames was an Englishman by descent and birth, having been born in Norfolkshire in 1576. He received a university education at Christ's College, Cambridge; where he was especially attracted and influenced by the teaching of Perkins, the celebrated Puritan preacher; and so distinguished himself that he obtained a fellowship in his college. Indeed, he would have been appointed Master of Christ's College, had he been willing to conform to the ecclesiastical ceremonies then enforced; but having adopted the views of the Puritans in reference to them, he conscientiously refused to do this. The same scruples caused him afterwards to be refused induction to Colchester by the Bishop of London, when he had been called

by the people of that town to be their minister. As at this time the Puritan preachers were all silenced in England by the High Commission under the lead of Archbishop Bancroft, some of their wealthy friends enabled Ames, along with Robert Parker, to remove to Holland; and in that land he found, though not without still further difficulty and delay, a field of active service to the cause of truth and sacred science. His first place of residence there was Leyden, where he translated into Latin a work by William Bradshaw in vindication of the Puritan principles. He was afterwards, for a time, chaplain to the English forces at the Hague, and while there married the daughter of Dr Burgess, his predecessor in that office.

The controversy raised by the peculiar opinions of Arminius was then at its height in Holland, and several acute and powerful works were contributed to the defence of Calvinism by the English exile. He first discussed in pamphlets one or two of the points in dispute, with Grevinchovius, of whom he was considered to have the advantage; and afterwards he published two treatises on the whole controversy, the one entitled, "Coronis ad Collationem Hagiensem," examining the statements of the Arminians at the Hague Conference, and the other, "Anti-Synodalia Scripta Remonstrantium," discussing those that they made to the Synod of Dort. At that memorable Assembly he was present, though not as a member; and he sent reports of its proceedings from time to

time to King James' ambassador at the Hague. After its rising, he was employed in the instruction of some theological students who were supported at the University of Leyden, by the liberality of certain Amsterdam merchants; and it was for their use that he composed the "Medulla Theologiæ," which he afterwards published. The influence of the English prelatical party, however, was still exerted against Ames, and prevented his being appointed a professor in Leyden; but in 1622 he was called to the chair of divinity in the University of Franeker, in Friesland. In this position he published, besides some smaller treatises and exegetical works, a book on casuistry, "De Conscientia et ejus jure," one of the earliest Protestant treatises on that subject, and also his largest work, "Bellarminus Enervatus," a complete though concise reply to the great Romish champion. After discharging the duties of his professorship for nearly eleven years, having begun to find the climate of Franeker too severe, he accepted an invitation to become pastor of the English congregation at Rotterdam, but his health had become so infirm that he did not benefit by the change. Then he resolved to remove to New England; but before he could do so, he was cut off by asthma at Rotterdam in November 1633.

William Ames is testified by those who knew him, to have been an eminently pious man; his history proves his strong conscientiousness and willingness to suffer for what he believed to be the cause of

Christ; and his works exhibit the learning, acuteness and spirituality of his mind. He belongs to the later race of Reformed theologians, who are indeed not to be compared in power of mind and freshness of thought to those heroes of the faith, Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, and Calvin, who laid the foundations of Protestant theology. But among the dogmaticians who succeeded them, he is entitled to a very high place, combining brevity with fulness and accuracy of statement, and breathing into all his reasonings a genuine and earnest spirit of Christian feeling. The value of his works may be judged from the opinion expressed by two of the most able modern theologians of different schools. Dr Cunningham says, "Ames or Amesius, whose writings on the Popish controversy, in reply to Bellarmine, cannot be spoken of except in the very highest terms of commendation, has also written several very able works against the Arminians." "A most zealous and uncompromising advocate of Calvinism," he yet "thought that Arminianism in its mitigated form was not to be reckoned a heresy, but only a dangerous error in doctrine tending to heresy." (Historical Theology, ii. p. 578). And Ritschl reckons Ames as equal to the Lutheran Baier in precision; while in genius, and the faculty of combination, he thinks that he surpasses him, and also the most of the Calvinistic theologians. (Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung, i. p. 284.)

The "Medulla Theologiæ" passed through several editions, and was finally included in the collection of Ames' works published in five volumes in 1658. An English translation was published by order of the Long Parliament in 1642, as "a work useful for this season," and it must have been familiar to the divines of the Westminster Assembly. Some traces of acquaintance with the "Medulla" may perhaps be observed in the arrangement of doctrines in the Larger Catechism (Comp. Ans. 6 with Med. Lib. i. c. iv. 8, 12; vii. 1, and viii. 1). Of the later dogmatic theologians, Van Mastricht, who is one of the very best, has most nearly followed Ames' plan, and expanded his thoughts.

The first book of this work, comprehending the whole of Dogmatic strictly so called, is now republished in the original Latin; mainly for the purpose of supplying the want of a brief theological textbook, in the use of which the study of Christian doctrine can be combined with exercise in Latin, a mastery of which is so important to the theologian. It is also hoped that the making more accessible a work of such intrinsic merit may be of some slight service to sound theology; and may tend to promote the study of the treasures of thought that lie too much neglected in the Latin works of the great Protestant divines. The book is reprinted from the edition of 1648, with the correction of some typographical errors; and a few notes have been added, simply to