

**FAITH AND DOUBT
IN THE CENTURY'S
POETS; PP. 1-135**

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Faith and Doubt in the Century's Poets; pp. 1-135 by Richard A. Armstrong

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RICHARD A. ARMSTRONG

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in the Century's Poets

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BY

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PREFACE.

THE following chapters comprise lectures delivered to my own congregation on Sunday evenings. I have somewhat modified or enlarged one or two of them, but I have not sought to erase traces of oral delivery and direct address.

In selecting six English poets representative of the religious Faith and Doubt which have contended for sway over the mind of our age, I may seem to have been somewhat arbitrary. But Byron's passionate nature little lent itself to the philosophic consideration of the profoundest themes, though Mr. Stopford Brooke has much to say on his influence in theology. Coleridge's considerable influence on religious thought was through his prose rather than his poems. Clough may seem here exalted to too august a companionship; but not so would have thought one at

Clough

least of those in whose company he here appears. And his disintegrating, yet essentially religious, mind is richly characteristic of the time in which he lived.

In order of birth my series would have run:—Wordsworth (1770), Shelley (1792), Tennyson (1809), Browning (1812), Clough (1819), Arnold (1822); in order of death, Shelley (1822), Wordsworth (1850), Clough (1861), Arnold (1888), Browning (1889), Tennyson (1892). But the sequence in which I have set them fairly represents, I think, the alternate swing of denial and affirmation which marks the record of our century. We look now for some other great affirmer to arise, some poet-prophet who shall herald the brighter and surer faith of the twentieth Christian century. William Watson possesses all the ethical enthusiasm requisite, and very high poetic gifts; but, alas! the flourishing of nations steeped in crime, or seemingly indifferent to it, has undermined his faith in the moral government of the world; and the touch of the Living God with the soul of man seems to him a dream. I long

greatly that he should recover a more piercing vision and a loftier trust. Then would he worthily carry on the line of prophetic poesy.

One liberty I have taken, not without hesitation, for which I hope I may be forgiven. Into my citations from the poets I have here and there introduced *italics* of my own, to help the reader to catch the point and pith of the illustration. If this small book leads a few to the earnest study of the masters of whom it treats, it will not have been written in vain.

R. A. A.

Liverpool,
February, 1898.

Contents.

	PAGE
I.—PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY:	
The Spirit of Revolt	1
II.—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH:	
Revelation through Nature and Man	23
III.—ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH:	
Between the Old Faith and the New	43
IV.—ALFRED TENNYSON:	
“The Larger Hope”	67
V.—MATTHEW ARNOLD:	
“The Eternal Note of Sadness” ...	91
VI.—ROBERT BROWNING:	
Faith Triumphant	114