

**THE RELATION OF  
JESUS TO HIS AGE AND  
OUR OWN. A LECTURE**

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The Relation of Jesus to His Age and Our Own. A lecture by J. Estlin Carpenter

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THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE, 1895.

The Relation of Jesus to  
his Age and our own

A Lecture

BY

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#### NOTE.

THIS Lecture is of course nothing more than a brief sketch of a vast subject. Before an Association constituted for the purpose of maintaining and diffusing a type of Christian thought widely differing in one important respect from the ideas of other branches of the Church, it seemed desirable to present, however imperfectly, a view of the person of Jesus as it emerges from critical enquiry in relation to some of the intellectual and moral tendencies of our time.

A few illustrations have been placed at the end in numbered notes.

J. E. C.

Oxford, June, 1895.

'CHRISTIANITY will never probably be the uncontradicted religion of all men. But there will be cause for satisfaction if it win to its side the noble, the truth-loving, the men who have a passion for righteousness. I should not despair of that, if such men only saw Christ truly. The Apologetic of the future must make it its business to communicate the vision to the few, that they in turn may communicate it to the many.'—

DR. A. B. BRUCE, *The Kingdom of God*, p. 340.

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**M**ORE than eight hundred years ago, in the fifteenth century of the Buddha, a devout disciple, driven from his home by persecution, poured out his soul to his Lord in such terms as these: 'Whether I live in heaven or in hell, whether in the city of ghosts or of men, let my mind be fixed on thee; for there is no other happiness for me. Thou art my father, mother, brother, sister; thou art my fast friend in danger, O dear one, thou art my lord, my teacher, who imparts to me knowledge sweet as nectar. Thou art my wealth, my enjoyment, my pleasure, my affluence, my greatness, my reputation, my knowledge, and my life.



Thou art my all, O all-knowing Buddha.' And in the fifteenth century of the Christ, the author of the *Imitation* wrote: 'I had rather be poor for thee than rich without thee; I rather choose to be a pilgrim on earth with thee than without thee to possess heaven. Where thou art, there is heaven, and where thou art not, there is death and hell . . . . O happy souls that have the privilege of receiving thee, their Lord God, with devout affection. O how great a Lord do they entertain, how great a guest do they harbour; how delightful a companion do they receive; how faithful a friend do they welcome; how noble and lofty a spouse do they embrace. O thou, my most sweet, most beloved, let heaven and earth and all their ornaments be silent in thy presence.'

So does the literature of devotion present the apprehension of the Eternal now under the form of a living Buddha, now of a living Christ. But the pious Evangelical can hardly tolerate a Christ made known in

the Real Presence, any more than he could recognize a communion with the Buddha attained through the loving study of the sacred word, or patient pilgrimage to a holy place. His experience is cast in another mould; it is inwrought with what has the deepest and most awful significance in his own life, his conviction of sin and his sense of forgiveness. There lies for him the proof of Christ's Deity, there is the justification of his belief, all else has value only in the schools.\* So for Christian and Buddhist the ultimate test of dogma lies in a personal intuition, a sense of spiritual connexion with the object of faith. Yet it must surely be apparent that what is apprehended has lost all the special marks of place and time by which its individuality is recognised. No one supposes himself to sustain direct spiritual fellowship with Luther or Plato. Wherever these exalted spirits may be,

\* Forsyth, 'Revelation and the Person of Christ,' in *Faith and Criticism*, p. 134.

they do not come within the range of any form of our consciousness. Only the universal and the everlasting can transcend the limitations of our separateness, and speak at the same moment to a thousand different souls. The particular cannot be at once both in and out of its historic relations ; nor can the personages of the past be known by any testimony of the present. The Gotama of the Ganges valley or the Jesus of the Galilean hills may be identified in faith with the infinite and the absolute, but they cannot be so known now, for when divested of their human forms, and transfigured into Godhead, they have dropped all the marks by which they were once distinguished. You can no more, by gazing on the Infinite Spirit, discern in him the specific lineaments of the teachers of the past, than by staring into space you can behold the Buddha under his Bo-tree, or the Christ upon the cross.

Our interior experience, then, must needs shape itself according to the moulds which