

**THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE, 1893.  
THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
THEOLOGY AS ILLUSTRATED IN  
ENGLISH POETRY FROM 1780 TO  
1830**

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The Essex Hall Lecture, 1893. The Development of Theology as Illustrated in English Poetry from 1780 to 1830 by Stopford A. Brooke

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THE  
Development of Theology

AS ILLUSTRATED IN

ENGLISH POETRY

*From 1780 to 1830*

STOPFORD <sup>Augustus</sup> A. BROOKE, M.A., LL.D.

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#### NOTE

IN January, 1892, the Council of the BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION approved of a scheme for the delivery and subsequent publication of a Lecture dealing with some aspect of the history and development of Christianity, as viewed from a liberal and progressive standpoint.

The first Lecture of the series was delivered at Essex Hall, London, by the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, M.A., LL.D., on Tuesday, 23rd May, 1893, and it is now issued to the public, in accordance with the terms of the Lectureship, in the hope that it may assist in advancing the cause of a truer and more helpful religious faith among men than that which still finds expression in creeds and churches commonly called 'orthodox.'

*London, August, 1893.*





## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEOLOGY

*As illustrated in English Poetry, 1780 to 1830.*

WHEN King Cnut sat by the sea-shore, his courtiers, flattering the pride they imputed to him, told him that the incoming tide would obey and retreat at his orders; and the king smiled and bade the sea return. But the waves broke around his chair, and he reproved the men who said that nature's movements would pause at his command.

There have been theologians for a thousand years who thought it could do honour to God to represent Him as forbidding the advance among men and in their mind of the ocean of His love from lower to higher levels. 'Here is the limit

of the tide,' they said. 'We are the only authority who can define it, and the King of Heaven speaks by our lips.' But the spiritual King, quietly seated on His throne, has allowed the slow incoming tide of wider thought in men to speak for Him, revealing, in the growth of universal ideas concerning His fatherhood of men, the real extent of His love; till now, in these latter days, we hear the sound of the waves which overthrow the barriers raised by teachers in the past. We understand that the tenderness of God does not retreat at the voice of those who flatter His might at the expense of His right, nor suffer itself to be limited by their inventions concerning His nature—inventions the real ground of which is the retention of their power. And we, uniting ourselves to the wider thoughts which the Spirit of God in man, in opposition to the priestcraft of Churches and sects, has now revealed, proclaim the universal power

of the Fatherhood of God to secure everlasting life for every soul, independent of all creeds, all churches, all confessions, all castes, all classes, and all colours; and to effectually call to Himself and effectually keep, at last, all His children to whose free-will only one thing is impossible—final division from the sovereignty of His love. When that conception of God is accepted, liberal theology has reached its highest peak. We stand on its summit and reach out our hands to God, with nothing between us and the infinity of His love. All the rocky limits set up by theologians in the past lie far below us; we have climbed beyond them all. The schemes of atonement which confined His Fatherhood to a few; the whole range of sacerdotalism, with its sacrificial theory created by and creating religious caste; the infallibilities of Church or Bible, without faith in which men were excluded from salvation; the compulsions and barriers of