

**THE CHRIST OF
ENGLISH POETRY;**

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The Christ of English poetry; by Charles William Stubbs

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CHARLES WILLIAM STUBBS

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POETRY

" Angelus Faciei Ejus salvavit eos."

ISAIAH lxiii. 9

*" That one Face far from vanish rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows."*

BROWNING

THE CHRIST
OF ENGLISH POETRY

BEING THE HULSEAN LECTURES DELIVERED
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
MCMIV-MCMV. BY CHARLES WILLIAM STUBBS, D.D.
DEAN OF ELY AND HON. FELLOW OF
SIDNEY SUSSEX COLLEGE



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TO

SIR OLIVER LODGE, D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S., &c.

PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM.

My dear Lodge,—I want, if you will let me, to dedicate this book to you, not only for the sake of "Auld Lang Syne" in Liverpool, but also because among the forces of the time which are most deeply influencing the religious thought of young Englishmen to-day, I count your writings. You may perhaps remember that at the close of a lecture, delivered a year or so ago at the Midland Institute under your chairmanship, in which I had suggested an analogy in regard to Shakespeare's Prospero, which you will find repeated in the third lecture of this course, you playfully said to me, "So then, you think Prospero was the poet himself: I had thought he had been a man of science." If you do me the honour to glance through these pages you will see that my chief object has been to impress upon my undergraduate congregation the doctrine that Personality is the mightiest force which God can bring to bear upon man, that the Supreme Personality in all history, the most potent factor in all civilised change and progress, is that of Jesus Christ, and how and why, therefore, this claim of Christ to supremacy in all human thought and action ought to affect and influence the moral character

no less than the intellectual attitude of every baptized disciple of Jesus. In these lectures I have endeavoured to show how this conception of Christ's Personality has been brought home to the English people, at four representative periods of our national life, by making my appeal, not to the witness of the Theologians, but to the witness of the Poets of England; and I have done so, because it seems to me that the Poets rather than the Theologians, or even the men of science, are the most representative, the most prophetic, the most clear-sighted, the most deep-hearted men of their time. You perhaps may think, others perhaps may think, that I should have been wiser as a Christian apologist if I had tried to read the lesson of Prospero's ideal allegory of human life from the scientific rather than the poetic point of view. It may be so. But you at least, among the foremost of our men of science to-day, are Poet enough to see (I quote your own words) "that God is One: that the Universe is an aspect and a revelation of God; that the Universe is struggling upward to a perfection not yet attained; that in the mighty process of evolution there is an eternal struggle towards more and more self-perception and fuller and more all-embracing existence of the Deity." There are theologians, no doubt, who will think that your further statement—that "The Christian idea of God is not that of a being outside the universe, above its struggles and advances, looking on and taking no part in the process, solely exalted, beneficent, self-determined and complete; no, it is also that of a God which loves, which yearns, which suffers, which keenly laments the rebellious and misguided activity

of the free agents whom He has brought into being as part of Himself, which enters into the storm and conflict, and is subject to conditions as a part of it all; conditions not artificial and transitory, but inherent in the process of producing free and conscious beings, and essential to the full self-development even of Deity"—falls somewhat short of a complete presentment of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. That is probable. But of this, I, at least, who am no theologian, am quite sure that if our men of science will only approach these great issues in your spirit of reverence and candour, and love of truth, there is a future of great hope for Theology: for Science will then have much to teach to Theology as to the true bearings both of the facts of revelation and of the phenomena of spiritual experience. Anyhow, for your attitude towards questions of Christian apology, I should like to thank you, not only for myself, but also on behalf of those young hearts for whom I have chiefly written these pages, in the hope that through a quickened interest in the witness of the English Poets to the Personality of Christ and to the Spirit of His Religion, they may be helped to gain some consciousness, if only by glimpse of His garment's hem, of the Mighty Figure in the Way before them, very man and very God.—Believe me, ever sincerely yours,

CHARLES W. STUBBS.

DEANERY, ELY,
December 6, 1905.

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