

BISHOP BUTLER

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Bishop Butler by W. A. Spooner

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W. A. SPOONER

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BY

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HONORARY CANON OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD

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PREFACE

THE publication within the last five years of two elaborate, and even sumptuous, editions of Bishop Butler's works seems to prove that they have still an interest for the reading public. Nor is it surprising that this should be the case. There is much in the temper and methods of our author which falls in with the needs of our own time and suits its scientific spirit.

With these larger and more elaborate editions the present work comes in no way into competition. Its object is twofold; first, to view Butler in his historical setting, — to see him in the light of the times in which he lived, the questions with which his thoughts were occupied, the controversies in which he bore so leading a part. On this side this little book merely attempts in a limited field what all history aims at on a larger scale. But, in the second place, an endeavour has been made to appraise the value of Butler's contributions to English thought, to separate the solid and permanent element in his writings from the more or less ephemeral and transitory, to determine what lessons of abiding interest for our own day his works contain.

In executing the former part of my task I have to acknowledge the deep debt I am under to Mr. Leslie Stephen's *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, and to Mr. Pattison's essay on *Tendencies of Religious Thought in England, 1688-1750*. Without these two admirable works this book would either never have been written or would have taken quite a different shape. If I have ventured sometimes to express my dissent from Mr. Stephen it is not because I impugn his facts or desire to controvert his arguments, but because I feel I differ from him on some fundamental questions of principle.

To Mr. Gladstone's edition of Butler's works I am greatly indebted for the division into sections which has made reference to the whole of Butler's writings for the first time possible and easy. In the references in the footnotes I have adopted throughout his division into sections. I have also followed him in referring to the Fifteen Sermons preached at the Rolls under the title of Sermons, and to the Six Sermons preached on public occasions as SS. In places, too, I have received real help from the *Analysis* given as a heading to the different sections. In other respects my debt to him is rather less than I anticipated. Of the Dissertations contained in the volume of *Studies Subsidiary to Butler's Works* some seemed to lie somewhat apart from the main topics treated of by Butler himself, while others appeared of rather subordinate interest. Yet no lover of Butler can fail to acknowledge how much Mr. Gladstone has done for

the study of Butler's works by making them generally accessible to the reading public, and commending them by the authority of his great name. Works to which Mr. Gladstone acknowledged his obligations, and to the elucidation of which he devoted the declining years of his life, could not fail to have attractions for many, at least in our generation. Of other authors whom I have consulted I have learnt most from Dean Church and Mr. Bagehot. Dean Church's appreciation is singularly sympathetic, and expressed with that felicity of language which distinguishes all his writings, while Mr. Bagehot's article is marked by his accustomed shrewdness and independence of judgment.

In conclusion, I have to express my gratitude to my friend and colleague Mr. H. W. B. Joseph for the trouble he has taken in revising my proofs, and for several valuable criticisms and suggestions.

NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD,
August 1901.

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