

**FUNDAMENTAL
RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES
IN BROWNING'S
POETRY; PP. 1-151**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649519217

Fundamental Religious Principles in Browning's Poetry; pp. 1-151 by W. D. Weatherford

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W. D. WEATHERFORD

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Fundamental Religious
Principles

IN

Browning's Poetry

By W. D. Weatherford, M.A.

*Submitted to the Faculty
of Vanderbilt University
as a Thesis for the Degree
of Doctor of Philosophy.*

SMITH & LAMAR, AGENTS
PUBLISHING HOUSE OF THE M. E. CHURCH, SOUTH
NASHVILLE, TENN.; DALLAS, TEX.
1907

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
FOREWORD	5
INTRODUCTION	7
CHAPTER I.	
THE IDEA OF GOD.....	17
CHAPTER II.	
CHRIST THE REVELATION OF GOD.....	51
CHAPTER III.	
THE PRINCIPLE OF DUALITY.....	76
CHAPTER IV.	
THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF EVIL.....	92
CHAPTER V.	
THE PURPOSE OF EVIL.....	120

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FOREWORD.

ROBERT BROWNING was one of the greatest seers as he was one of the foremost poets of his time. His poetry is a study of the deeper problems of life. These were more to him than all the forms of art. God, Christ, the World, Man, Suffering, Sin—these are in reality the subjects of his thought. They emerge everywhere in his poems. Though he was not professedly a theologian, he has thought more vitally and written more helpfully on the problems of theology than most of the theology makers. Browning saw life. He saw it sanely. He saw it deeply. His starting point was life, his data, the experiences of the human soul. Upon these he reasoned, free from the biases of theological training and the narrowing restrictions of theological method. He touches the great vital truths, and he touches them with a vital touch. He has therefore vital messages on the fundamental problems and principles. His messages will reach and help those who do not read theology—and those who do.

Mr. Weatherford has made a thorough study of Browning's works, has gathered up his views on the great fundamentals, has arranged them in systematic

order, and has put them in plain and lucid prose. Browning interpreted nature, man, life; and Mr. Weatherford has interpreted Browning's interpretation. The result is a fresh and breathing statement of the reality and personality of God, the divine-human and the human-divine of Christ, and an elucidation of the problem of evil—physical and moral—suffering and sin—which, itself out of the ordinary, affords relief and comfort of no ordinary sort.

We most heartily commend this little book to all those who want help in understanding Browning and those who want help in understanding the "mystery of this unintelligible world."

GROSS ALEXANDER.

Nashville, Tenn., May, 1907.

NOTE.—The references in the book are to the Camberwell Edition of Browning's works, in twelve volumes, edited by Porter and Clarke.

INTRODUCTION.

It is the glory and good of Art,
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least.¹

THERE is in the heart of every man a philosophy of life which is struggling for expression. This philosophy, sometimes crude, sometimes more finished, is perpetually expressing itself in the life work of the individual man. The long-drawn dissertation of the philosopher is his attempt to say how he sees life. The exquisite workmanship of the artist is but the outpouring on the canvas of that ideal of life which absorbs his heart. Not less than these, and even more of necessity than either of them, every great poem becomes a more or less perfect expression of some part of the poet's philosophy. The deeper and more absorbing that philosophy, the more difficult will be its expression. It is difficult in that the forms of

¹"The Book and the Ring," VII. 329.

the syllogism do not easily lend themselves to poetic expression, and the visions of poetry are not easily reduced to the categories of logic. Browning had no intention of writing a philosophy, but filled as his mind was with the philosophical discussions of his time, the content of his writing must be, from the very nature of the man, a discussion of the great realities of life. On the other hand, the form of his thought could only shape itself in poetry. As the poet grew older he came to feel that some truths could be accurately and adequately expressed in this form alone. Truth is so complex that to see it rightly we must view it from many sides, each facet reflecting a new and changing beauty. To present separately these various phases occasions seeming contradiction, but when all are combined in a single conception they give a more satisfactory expression of truth than could ever be attained by a logical process. The fact that Browning does thus view truth from every direction has given rise to many contradictory opinions concerning the value and content of his poetry. He has been charged with heresy