

**THE CONFESSIONS  
OF A  
BROWNING LOVER**

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The Confessions of a Browning Lover by John Walker Powell

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BY  
JOHN WALKER POWELL



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**TO "H. G."**

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	PREFACE .....	9
I.	OF THE POET AS ARTIST.....	15
II.	OF ARTISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS.....	49
III.	OF IDEAS AND FORMS.....	78
IV.	OF ORTHODOXY AND THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE.....	100
V.	OF STRUCTURAL vs. ORNAMENTAL TRUTH.....	132
VI.	OF LIFE AND LOVE.....	157
VII.	OF THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.....	185
VIII.	PROSPICE.....	213





## PREFACE

As I look over these pages, now that they are finished, I wonder if I have accomplished the purpose with which I began. I seem to have been "ever a fighter." The controversial note runs through much of what I have written. Well, there seem to be plenty of windmills in our modern life at which to tilt, and a Browning lover ought not to be averse to breaking a lance now and then. If sometimes I have fought with shadows, or doughtily overthrown a man of straw, it may be I have discovered to the world some lurking enemy whose presence was unsuspected, or that I have shown the unknowing where they may arm themselves when the hour comes to fight.

I have not much concerned me with many matters of usual interest to commentators. I have not attempted to discover the meaning of puzzling passages, nor to elucidate obscure references, preferring to leave these things to the learned librarian's assistants who delight in them. I have come upon many amusing discoveries in my reading. Solemn notes in the appendix of well-known editions attribute the most impossible meanings to the poet, or mistake the most obvious references. Misquotations abound in the writings of those who are esteemed authorities. Sometimes the slightest tincture of Browning seems to

## PREFACE

have power to color whole seas of sentimental vaporings on the part of popular lecturers. None of these things move me. I may have sinned in my own way, but neither an annotator nor a commentator will I be.

It may be that I have laid myself open to the charge of rambling into fields remote from the path I set out to follow; of venturing to express opinions on matters of literary or artistic criticism too high for me. But I have ranged no more widely than Browning himself, whose interests veered from art and music to metaphysics, Greek tragedies, and mediæval history. If I have spoken as an *amateur* and not as the scribes, allowance may be made for the liberty of the confessional. I shall be content, not if the reader agrees with what I may have said of art or philosophy, but if I have roused him to thought.

Another point at which I venture to anticipate the critics is in the matter of my attitude toward modernism, both in literature and in science. As to what I have said of the chief writers of our day I have no apology to make. That they are great artists I have cheerfully admitted. That they have no comprehensive philosophy of life, no sufficient answer to its deepest questions, it seems to me they would themselves as freely grant. The interpretation of Christianity embodied in the traditions of the church has been definitely set aside by all the principal votaries of literature, who base their thinking on the science of the