

**THE RING AND THE BOOK
BY ROBERT BROWNING:
AN INTERPRETATION**

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The ring and the book by Robert Browning: an interpretation by Francis Bickford Hornbrooke

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FRANCIS BICKFORD HORN BROOKE

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Francis B. Hornbrook

THE RING AND THE BOOK
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AN INTERPRETATION

BY

FRANCIS BICKFORD
HORNBROOKE, D.D.

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1911

The Bell

To
ANN FRANCES BURR
FOR MANY YEARS THE FAITHFUL AND LOYAL FRIEND OF
THE AUTHOR AND HIS WIFE
THIS BOOK
IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

*The Guild
of Los Angeles*

FOREWORD

FRANCIS BICKFORD HORN BROOKE was born in Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia), May 7, 1849. He was just thirty-seven years younger than Robert Browning, and was always pleased that his birthday fell on the same day as that of the great poet he loved and studied so many years.

He was of mixed ancestry, being of Dutch and English extraction on his father's side and, on his mother's, of German and Scotch-Irish. The name is Dutch, and tradition says that the family came from the little town of Brœck near Amsterdam. He was the only child of Thomas Bickford and Jane (Lopeman) Hornbrooke, and was named indirectly for Sir Francis Burdett, the great English radical and a distant kinsman of the Hornbrooke family. He was most patriotically and intensely American, though he was only of the first generation in this country, his father having been born in Bristol, England. His far-off ancestor went from Holland to England in 1688 with William of Orange. William the Silent was one of his great heroes and he recalled

with pride and pleasure that his ancestors undoubtedly fought on the dykes of Holland for the great Father of his Country.

Dr. Hornbrooke's father died when his son was in his infancy. The boy was educated in the public schools of Wheeling and took his college course in the Ohio University at Athens, Ohio, graduating in 1870. Getting a college education was no easy matter for the fatherless boy, who early showed a love of reading and study that amounted to a passion. To get the means for his college course he did all sorts of work in vacations and odd times, shrinking from nothing however hard and disagreeable if it would further his cherished ambition. He early decided to go into the ministry and was graduated at Union Theological Seminary, New York, and later at Harvard Divinity School.

He was married in 1874 to Orinda Althea Dudley, a direct descendant of Thomas Dudley, the second colonial governor of Massachusetts. They had two sons who with the wife survive him.

He had three parishes. The first was that of the Union Congregational (Trinitarian) Church in East Hampton, Connecticut. While there he decided that his theological views were more in sympathy with the Unitarian than with the Or-

thodox faith, and left to take the pastorate of the First Parish (Unitarian) Church in Weston, Massachusetts.

It was during his country pastorates that he made that close study of the works of Frederick W. Robertson, Cardinal Newman, and of the early Fathers of the Church for which he was afterwards noted. Dr. C. C. Everett of Harvard University urged him to write a book on church history, but the time of leisure for such a work never came and his knowledge of the subject went into his sermons and various papers. He devoted himself with such conscientious fidelity to the especial interests of his parishes, never for a moment neglecting any duty as a pastor for even his beloved literary studies, that only untiring industry allowed him time for anything else.

After three years of service in Weston he accepted a call to the Channing Church in the neighboring city of Newton, for which he labored for twenty-one years, refusing calls to some of the largest churches in the Unitarian body.

During his pastorate, and greatly by his efforts, the present beautiful church edifice was erected.

During the last fifteen years of his life he was a constant lecturer on literary subjects, giving courses of lectures on Tolstoi, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Browning, and many others. These he