THE RING AND THE BOOK; IN FOUR VOLUMES, VOL. III

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The ring and the book; in four volumes, Vol. III by Robert Browning

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ROBERT BROWNING

THE RING AND THE BOOK; IN FOUR VOLUMES, VOL. III

Trieste

THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

BY

ROBERT BROWNING,

HONORARY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON. 1869.

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THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

VII.

POMPILIA.

I AM just seventeen years and five months old, And, if I lived one day more, three full weeks ; 'T is writ so in the church's register, Lorenzo in Lucina, all my names At length, so many names for one poor child, —Francesca Camilla Vittoria Angela Pompilia Comparini,—laughable ! Also 't is writ that I was married there Four years ago : and they will add, I hope, When they insert my death, a word or two,— VOL. III. B

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Omitting all about the mode of death,-This, in its place, this which one cares to know, That I had been a mother of a son Exactly two weeks. It will be through grace O' the Curate, not through any claim I have ; 15 Because the boy was born at, so baptized Close to, the Villa, in the proper church : A pretty church, I say no word against, Yet stranger-like,-while this Lorenzo seems My own particular place, I always say. 20 I used to wonder, when I stood scarce high As the bed here, what the marble lion meant, With half his body rushing from the wall, Eating the figure of a prostrate man-(To the right, it is, of entry by the door) 25 An ominous sign to one baptized like me, Married, and to be buried there, I hope. And they should add, to have my life complete, He is a boy and Gaetan by name-Gaetano, for a reason,-if the friar 30 Don Celestine will ask this grace for me Of Curate Ottoboni : he it was

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POMPILIA.

Baptized me : he remembers my whole life As I do his grey hair.

. All these few things 35 I know are true,—will you remember them ? Because time flies. The surgeon cared for me, To count my wounds,—twenty-two dagger-wounds, Five deadly, but I do not suffer much— Or too much pain,—and am to die to-night. 40

Oh how good God is that my babe was born, —Better than born, baptized and hid away Before this happened, safe from being hurt ! That had been sin God could not well forgive : He was too young to smile and save himself. 45 When they took, two days after he was born, My babe away from me to be baptized And hidden awhile, for fear his foe should find,— The country-woman, used to nursing babes, Said "Why take on so ? where is the great loss ? 50 " These next three weeks he will but sleep and feed, " Only begin to smile at the month's end ;

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

" He would not know you, if you kept him here, "Sooner than that ; so, spend three merry weeks "Snug in the Villa, getting strong and stout, 55 " And then I bring him back to be your own, " And both of you may steal to-we know where !" The month-there wants of it two weeks this day ! Still, I half fancied when I heard the knock At the Villa in the dusk, it might prove she-60 Come to say "Since he smiles before the time, "Why should I cheat you out of one good hour? " Back I have brought him ; speak to him and judge !" Now I shall never see him ; what is worse, When he grows up and gets to be my age, 65 He will seem hardly more than a great boy ; And if he asks "What was my mother like?" People may answer "Like girls of seventeen"-And how can he but think of this and that, Lucias, Marias, Sofias, who titter or blush 70 When he regards them as such boys may do? Therefore I wish some one will please to say I looked already old though I was young ; Do I not . . say, if you are by to speak . .

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