

**THE RING AND THE  
BOOK. IN FOUR  
VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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The ring and the book. In four Volumes, Vol. I by Robert Browning

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**ROBERT BROWNING**

**THE RING AND THE  
BOOK. IN FOUR  
VOLUMES, VOL. I**



THE  
RING AND THE BOOK.

BY

ROBERT BROWNING.

M.A.,

HONORARY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

*IN FOUR VOLUMES.*

VOL. I.

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1868.

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THE  
RING AND THE BOOK.

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I.

THE RING AND THE BOOK.

Do you see this Ring?

'T is Rome-work, made to match

(By Castellani's imitative craft)

Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,

After a dropping April; found alive 5

Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side figtree-roots

That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,

Yet crisp as jewel-cutting. There 's one trick,

(Craftsmen instruct me) one approved device

And but one, fits such slivers of pure gold 10



As this was,—such mere oozings from the mine,  
Virgin as oval tawny pendent tear  
At beehive-edge when ripened combs o'erflow,—  
To bear the file's tooth and the hammer's tap :  
Since hammer needs must widen out the round, 15  
And file emboss it fine with lily-flowers,  
Ere the stuff grow a ring-thing right to wear,  
That trick is, the artificer melts up wax  
With honey, so to speak ; he mingles gold  
With gold's alloy, and, duly tempering both, 20  
Effects a manageable mass, then works.  
But his work ended, once the thing a ring,  
Oh, there 's repristination ! Just a spirt  
O' the proper fiery acid o'er its face,  
And forth the alloy unfastened flies in fume ; 25  
While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains,  
The rondure brave, the lilled loveliness,  
Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore :  
Prime nature with an added artistry—  
No carat lost, and you have gained a ring. 30

What of it? 'T is a figure, a symbol, say ;  
A thing's sign : now for the thing signified.

Do you see this square old yellow Book, I toss  
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about  
By the crumpled vellum covers,—pure crude fact 35  
Secreted from man's life when hearts beat hard,  
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since ?  
Examine it yourselves ! I found this book,  
Gave a *lira* for it, eightpence English just,  
(Mark the predestination !) when a Hand, 40  
Always above my shoulder, pushed me once,  
One day still fierce 'mid many a day struck calm,  
Across a Square in Florence, crammed with booths,  
Buzzing and blaze, noontide and market-time ;  
'Toward Baccio's marble,—ay, the basement-ledge 45  
O' the pedestal where sits and menaces  
John of the Black Bands with the upright spear,  
'Twixt palace and church,—Riccardi where they lived,  
His race, and San Lorenzo where they lie.

This book,—precisely on that palace-step 50  
 Which, meant for lounging knaves o' the Medici,  
 Now serves re-venders to display their ware,—  
 'Mongst odds and ends of ravage, picture-frames  
 White through the worn gilt, mirror-sconces chipped,  
 Bronze angel-heads once knobs attached to chests, 55  
 (Handled when ancient dames chose forth brocade)  
 Modern chalk drawings, studies from the nude,  
 Samples of stone, jet, breccia, porphyry  
 Polished and rough, sundry amazing busts  
 In baked earth, (broken, Providence be praised!) 60  
 A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web  
 When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,  
 Now offered as a mat to save bare feet  
 (Since carpets constitute a cruel cost)  
 Treading the chill *scagliola* bedward: then 65  
 A pile of brown-etched prints, two *crasie* each,  
 Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth  
 —Sowing the Square with works of one and the same  
 Master, the imaginative Sieneſe