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

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RING AND THE BOOK.

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ROBERT BROWNING.

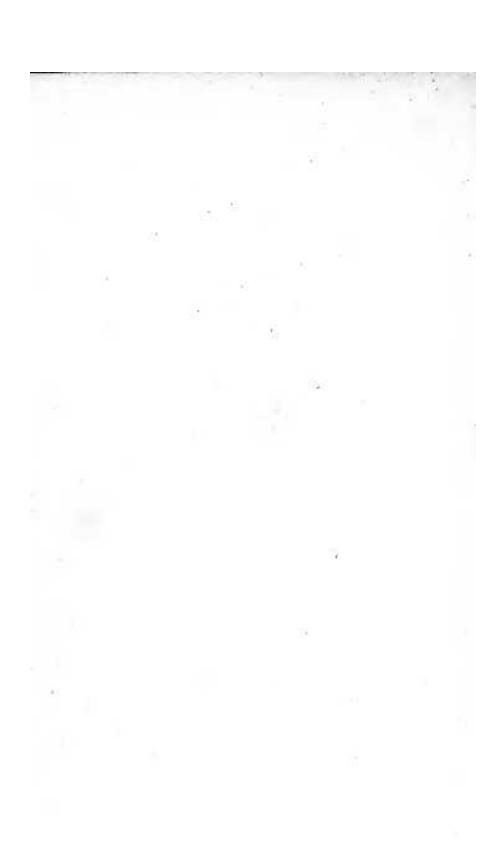
M.A.,

HONORARY PESSON OF RALLIDE COLLEGE, OXFORD,

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. 1.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON. 1868.





CONTENTS.

	AGE
THE RING AND THE BOOK	j
HALF-ROME	75
THE OTHER HALF-ROME	157

THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

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

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VOL. I.

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; While, self-sufficient now, the shape remains, The rondure brave, the lilied 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, breedia, perphyry 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 crazic each, Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth -Sowing the Square with works of one and the same Master, the imaginative Sienese