

**THE RING  
AND THE BOOK**

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The Ring and the Book by Frederic Palmer

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**FREDERIC PALMER**

**THE RING  
AND THE BOOK**



# THE RING AND THE BOOK

WRITTEN FOR

*The Christmas Festival 1907*

BY

*FREDERIC PALMER*

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PRIVATELY PRINTED

1908

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TO  
F. P. JR.  
&  
H. W. P.

WOP 19 FEB 36



## PROLOGUE

D'VE see that Book stands in the bookcase yon  
Beneath Calhoun's grim face, half frown, half smile?  
Top shelf but one, seventh from the left-hand side,  
Seven in the set, too — mark you that! — and all  
In one shy olive binding; such a tint  
As clothes the Crosse and Blackwell's, labeled "Queen,"  
When, 'twixt the courses, failing further talk,  
He, bored, takes, passes them to worse-bored She.  
That is the Book. I saw it first one eve;  
One Christmas eve, to be exact; the place,  
There in the Chapel yonder, where they swarmed,  
Dick, Tom, Jane, Margaret (now no more called Meg),  
With Johns of course and Marys sprinkled in,  
And proud Papa, Mamma, and all the Aunts,  
Sunday School teachers, lastly Santa Claus.  
And towards the end, as custom is, they cry,  
"This for the Rector!" That means me. I step  
Forward with blush and smile, while all the crowd  
Gaze, gape, as I cut string, tear paper, and  
Unfold this set in olive; poems all,  
Done years past by one Browning — that's his name.  
That then's the Book; both Browning's Book and mine.  
Mine all; not to read merely, put in case,  
Lend, mark the empty space — "Who in the deuce  
Did I lend Browning there to?" — but to read,  
Mark (pencil-fashion if I will),  
Learn, inwardly digest (so runs the prayer),  
Sink down into my mind, and come up here  
In fashion his, in substance wholly mine.  
No need to tell you that; you'd know, you say.

1874



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Now for the Ring. D' ye see it on her hand,  
 Third finger, left? I helped to put it there.  
 He said them after me, the fateful words,  
 "With this ring I thee wed," and all the rest.  
 A year before, he had not seen her. Yet  
 There came a voyage, came propinquity,  
 Clear moonlit nights, calm seas, and chairs placed close.  
 Much of the business done, as you surmise.  
 Voyage ended, then a keepsake, then a call,  
 And finally a Harvard foot-ball game.  
 That settled it; the Red was vanquished quite,  
 Harvard both in the field and on the bench.  
 Of course a walk or two, a flower or two,  
 Must come before the final "Ask Mamma!"  
 She weeps, consents, "Bless you, my children!" just  
 The proper stage way. But lo! two months gone,  
 Whips the girl off to Europe once again.  
 "*Ai ai, Otototoi, Popoi, da!*" so  
 They wailed, or said in plainer English, "Damn!"  
 Then pence were spent in pens and postage-stamps,  
 And tedious days checked off on calendar.  
 And now, love's course proved true through not being smooth,  
 It must try being true and smooth besides.  
 Even Don Giorgio nods his "Yes, you may."  
 "Who's he?" Well, well, my country friend! you have  
 Still some o' the hayseed sticking in your hair.  
 This Giorgio's Don, Chief, Head-man, what you will,  
 Great Mumbo Jumbo of the Palmer Clan;  
 Nay more, Floor-walker to the Universe,  
 Whose each transaction must be first approved,  
 Stamped, validated, by his signature.  
 Things cannot happen till he gives the word.  
 An Adam he, to whom the animals  
 Must come — ox, fox, cock, seal o' the rocks —

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And whatsoe'er he calls it, that's its name.  
So when he said, "You may," the two breathed free,  
Jumped up and laughed and clapped their little hands,  
And straight gave orders for the wedding-cake.  
So here we are come to the Ring again;  
Here, Browning-Book-wise, meet it, they and we.  
No private wedding, parsonage affair,  
But Aunt Jane on to twentieth Cousin Dick,  
His College Chums and her Six Dearest Friends.  
Then I come in, all surplice, hood, and book,  
With my "Love, honor, and" — dread word! — "obey."  
She swallowed it, however, not a gulp,  
Only too glad to vow obedience  
To one she had not seen ten months before.  
Then 'twixt the lobster and the *café noir*,  
"Where are they going?" "Are n't they just too sweet!"  
"Who got the thimble?" "Who the bride's bouquet?"  
And soon confetti, rice, old boots, and bells  
Make every window filled, up, down the street.  
Have you, Sir, Madam, known a honey-moon?  
You have! No need describe it then to you.  
You have not! No use try to tell you then.  
In either case, whether 't is memory or  
Imagination paints the canvas rich,  
Fill in some weeks with travel, rides, walks, sails,  
Make catalogue long as even Walt Whitman loves,  
And all fused, suffused, in a golden glow;  
Wherein the adventure of discovery  
Joins hands with common blessed certainty;  
Wherein the strangeness of "Never before"  
Turns wonderingly to wealth of every day.  
Leave them in Eden or in Annisquam,  
Fearless of exit or of Flaming Sword,  
Since even then each would go forth with each.

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What need to tell of Cambridge, Mt. Desert,  
Of Boxford, Wellfleet, and Chocorua?  
Friends, occupations, weather, all were kind,  
And measles only gave the chance to say,  
"Now, Sir, just see what a good nurse you've got!"  
Even the Universe, often so harsh,  
Giorgio permitting, turned to them and smiled.  
"You want a house," it said, "at Haverford?  
Well, you shall have it. True, there is but one,  
One only in the College grounds, the town,  
One only short of Philadelphia.  
True, others want it too. But you, my Dears,  
Yours it shall be. Anything else you wish?"

So there they are, the Ring circling them in,  
The Universe still smiling, and the Pair  
Making the Ring completer day by day.  
Turn to the Book now, and you shall discern  
How not the Universe but this little world,  
Its North and South, its Right and Left, beholds  
The goings of the Pair, condemns, approves,  
Judges their way, and how they judge themselves.