THE RING AND THE BOOK; IN FOUR VOLUMES. VOL. IV

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The Ring and the Book; In Four Volumes. Vol. IV by Robert Browning

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ROBERT BROWNING

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RING AND THE BOOK.

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ROBERT BROWNING,

HONORARY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXPORD-

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

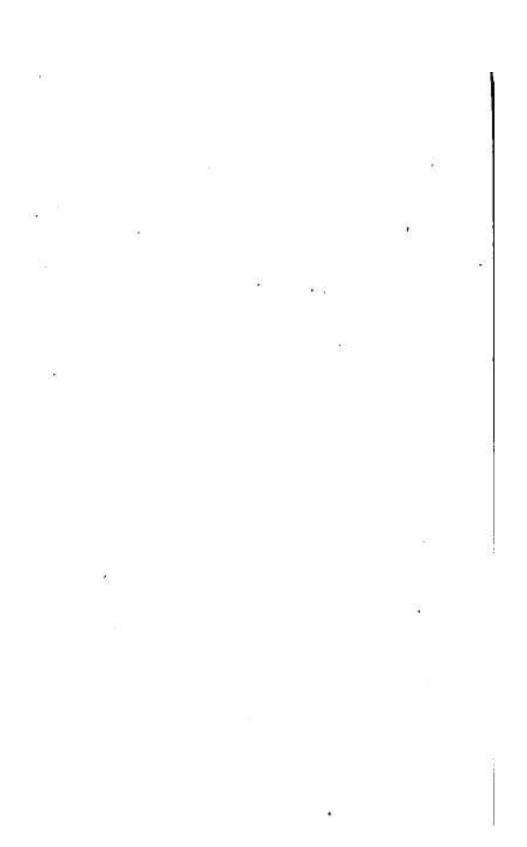
VOL. IV.

SMITH, ELDER AND CO., LONDON. 1869.

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THE

RING AND THE BOOK.

X.

THE POPE.

Like to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,
I'will begin,—as is, these seven years now,
My daily wont,—and read a History
(Written by one whose deft right hand was dust
To the last digit, ages ere my birth)

Of all my predecessors, Popes of Rome:
For though mine ancient early dropped the pen,
Yet others picked it up and wrote it dry,
Since of the making books there is no end.
And so I have the Papacy complete

10
From Peter first to Alexander last;
Can question each and take instruction so.

Have I to dare,—I ask, how dared this Pope?

To suffer? Suchanone, how suffered he?

Being about to judge, as now, I seek

How judged once, well or ill, some other Pope;

Study some signal judgment that subsists

To blaze on, or else blot, the page which seals

The sum up of what gain or loss to God

Came of His one more Vicar in the world.

20

So, do I find example, rule of life;

So, square and set in order the next page,

Shall be stretched smooth o'er my own funeral cyst.

Eight hundred years exact before the year

I was made Pope, men made Formosus Pope,

Say Sigebert and other chroniclers.

Ere I confirm or quash the Trial here

Of Guido Franceschini and his friends,

Read,—how there was a ghastly Trial once

Of a dead man by a live man, and both, Popes:

30

Thus—in the antique penman's very phrase.

- "Then Stephen, Pope and seventh of the name,
- " Cried out, in synod as he sat in state,
- " While choler quivered on his brow and beard,

" 'Come into court, Formosus, thou lost wretch,	35
" ' That claimedst to be late the Pope as I!'	
" And at the word, the great door of the church	
" Flew wide, and in they brought Formosus' self,	
"The body of him, dead, even as embalmed	
" And buried duly in the Vatican	40
" Eight months before, exhumed thus for the nonce.	
"They set it, that dead body of a Pope,	
"Clothed in pontific vesture now again,	
" Upright on Peter's chair as if alive.	
" And Stephen, springing up, cried furiously	45
" ' Bishop of Porto, wherefore didst presume	CONTRA
" To leave that see and take this Roman see,	
" ' Exchange the lesser for the greater see,	
" ' -A thing against the canons of the Church?'	
"Then one, (a Deacon who, observing forms,	50
"Was placed by Stephen to repel the charge,	
" Be advocate and mouthpiece of the corpse)	
" Spoke as he dared, set stammeringly forth	
"With white lips and dry tongue,-as but a youth,	
" For frightful was the corpse-face to behold,-	55
" How nowise lacked there precedent for this.	

St.		
" But w	hen, for his last precedent of all,	
" Embo	oldened by the Spirit, out he blurts	
"'And	, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself	
" ' Vaca	ate the lesser for the greater see,	60
" ' Hali	f a year since change Arago for Rome?'	
"'—Y	e have the sin's defence now, synod mine!'	ij.
" Shriel	ks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage:	
" ' Judg	ge now betwixt him dead and me alive !	
" ' Hat	h he intruded or do I pretend?	65
3570,0000	ge, judge!'—breaks wavelike one whole fo wrath.	am of
" Wher	eupon they, being friends and followers,	
" Said	Ay, thou art Christ's Vicar, and not he!	
" ' Awa	y with what is frightful to behold !	
" 'This	s act was uncanonic and a fault.'	70
" Then	, swallowed up in rage, Stephen exclaimed	
" ' So,	guilty! So, remains I punish guilt!	
"'He	is unpoped, and all he did I damn:	
" ' The	Bishop, that ordained him, I degrade:	

" ' Depose to laics those he raised to priests:

" 'It is confusion, let it vex no more!

" 'What they have wrought is mischief nor shall stand,

75