

**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

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

THE
RING AND THE BOOK.

BY

ROBERT BROWNING,
M.A.,

HONORARY FELLOW OF BALLIOL COLLEGE, OXFORD.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

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THE
RING AND THE BOOK.

X

THE POPE.

LIKE to Ahasuerus, that shrewd prince,
I'll 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) 5
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 15
 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, 25
 Say Sigébert 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, Fornosus, 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
“ ‘ 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.

" But when, for his last precedent of all,
 " Emboldened by the Spirit, out he blurts
 " ' And, Holy Father, didst not thou thyself
 " ' Vacate the lesser for the greater see, 60
 " ' Half a year since change Arago for Rome ?'
 " ' —Ye have the sin's defence now, synod mine !'
 " Shrieks Stephen in a beastly froth of rage :
 " ' Judge now betwixt him dead and me alive !
 " ' Hath he intruded or do I pretend ? 65
 " ' Judge, judge !'—breaks wavelike one whole foam of
 wrath.

" Whereupon they, being friends and followers,
 " Said ' Ay, thou art Christ's Vicar, and not he !
 " ' Away with what is frightful to behold !
 " ' This 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 : 75
 " ' What they have wrought is mischief nor shall stand,
 " ' It is confusion, let it vex no more !