

THE INN ALBUM

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649613922

The Inn Album by Robert Browning

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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ROBERT BROWNING

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BY
ROBERT BROWNING

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1875

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THE INN ALBUM.

I.

“ THAT oblong book’s the Album ; hand it here !
Exactly ! page on page of gratitude
For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view !
I praise these poets : they leave margin-space ;
Each stanza seems to gather skirts around,
And primly, trimly, keep the foot’s confine,
Modest and maidlike ; lubber prose o’ersprawls
And straddling stops the path from left to right.
Since I want space to do my cipher-work,

B

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Which poem spares a corner? What comes first?

'*Hail, calm activity, salubrious spot!*'

(Open the window, we burn daylight, boy!).

Or see—succincter beauty, brief and bold—

'*If a fellow can dine On rumpsteaks and port wine*

He needs not despair Of dining well here—'

'*Here!*' I myself could find a better rhyme!

That bard's a Browning; he neglects the form:

But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!

Still, I prefer this classic. Ay, throw wide!

I'll quench the bits of candle yet unburnt.

A minute's fresh air, then, to cipher-work!

Three little columns hold the whole account:

Ecarté, after which—Blind Hookey—then

Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.

'Tis easy reckoning: I have lost, I think."

Two personages occupy this room
Shabby-genteel, that's parlour to the inn
Perched on a view-commanding eminence ;
—Inn which may be a veritable house
Where somebody once lived and pleased good taste
Till tourists found his coigne of vantage out,
And fingered blunt the individual mark
And vulgarized things comfortably smooth.
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag ;
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds ;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,
Varnished and confined, *Salmo ferox* glares,
—Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed
And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.

So much describes the stuffy little room—
Vulgar flat smooth respectability :
Not so the burst of landscape surging in,
Sunrise and all, as he who of the pair
Is, plain enough, the younger personage
Draws sharp the shrieking curtain, sends aloft
The sash, spreads wide and fastens back to wall
Shutter and shutter, shows you England's best.
He leans into a living glory-bath
Of air and light where seems to float and move
The wooded watered country, hill and dale
And steel-bright thread of stream, a-smoke with mist,
A-sparkle with May morning, diamond drift
O' the sun-touched dew. Except the red-roofed patch
Of half a dozen dwellings that, crept close
For hill-side shelter, make the village-clump,

This inn is perched above to dominate—
Except such sign of human neighbourhood,
And this surmised rather than sensible,
There's nothing to disturb absolute peace,
The reign of English nature—which means art
And civilized existence. Wildness' self
Is just the cultured triumph. Presently
Deep solitude, be sure, reveals a Place
That knows the right way to defend itself :
Silence hems round a burning spot of life.
Now, where a Place burns, must a village brood,
And where a village broods, an inn should boast—
Close and convenient : here you have them both.
This inn, the Something-arms—the family's—
(Don't trouble Guillim : heralds leave out half !)
Is dear to lovers of the picturesque,