

In days of yore, there dwelt in East a man
Who from a loving hand received a ring
Of immense value. Its stone was an opal
That shot an ever-changing tint; moreover,
It had the hidden power, him to render
Of God and man beloved, who, to this end, wore it.
To no surprise, the eastern man never drew it off his finger
And made provisions to secure it
Forever to his house. Thus: He bequeathed it
First to the most beloved of his sons
Ordained that he again should leave the ring
To the most dear among his children
And that without heeding birth, the favorite son
In virtue of the ring alone
Should always be the lord of the house.

From son to son,
At length this ring descended to a father
Who had three sons, alike obedient to him,
Whom therefore he could not but love alike
At times seemed this, then that, at times the third,
Accordingly as each apart received
The overflowings of his heart, most worthy
To heir the ring which, with good-natured weakness,
He privately to each had promised

This went on for a while. But death approached
And the good father grew embarrassed.
So to disappoint two sons who'd trust his promise
He could not bear. What's to be done?
He sends in secret to a jeweler of whom
Upon the model of the real ring
He might bespeak two others, and commanded
To spare nor cost nor pains to make them like,
Quite like the true one. This the artist managed

The rings were brought, and even the father's eye
Could not distinguish which had been the model
Quite overjoyed he summons all his sons
Takes leave of each apart, on each bestows
His blessing and his ring, and dies.

Upon his death, each son came forward
And each laid claim to be the master of the house
Each had the ring and each the right but
None could prove his ring to be the true one.
Just like the one true faith can not be proven.

The sons complained
Each to the judge
Swore, from his father's hand immediately
To have received the ring – as was the case
After he had long obtained the father's promise
One day to own the ring – as also was
The father, each asserted, could to him
Not have been false; rather than so suspect
Of such a father, willing as he might be
With charity to judge his brethren,
He of treacherous forgery was bold to accuse them.

The judge said: If you summon not the father
Before my seat, I cannot give a sentence
Am I to guess enigmas? Or expect you
That the true ring should here unseal its lips?

But hold – you tell me that the real ring
Enjoys the hidden power to make the wearer
Of God and man beloved – let that decide!
Because the false rings could not do that, right?
Now, which one of you do two of you love the best?
You're silent? Do these love-exciting rings
Act inward only, not without?
Does each of you love but himself?
You're all deceived deceivers – none of your rings is true!
The real ring perhaps is gone. To hide or to supply its loss,
Your father ordered three for one.

And, the judge continued,
If each of you has had a ring presented by his father
Let each believe his own the real ring
'Tis possible the father chose no longer
To tolerate the one ring's tyranny
And certainly, as he much loved you all
And loved you all alike, it could not please him
By favoring one, to be of two the oppressor

Let each be honored by this free affection
Unwarped of prejudice
let each endeavour to vie with both his brothers in displaying
The virtue of his ring.
And if the virtues of the ring continue
To show themselves among your children's children
After a thousand, thousand years,
Appear before this judgment seat
A greater one than I
Shall sit upon it and decide