I premise, and wish to have distinctly borne in mind by any reader of this poem, that it is no more nor less than a mere account treated poetically, of certain problematic facts taken just as I find them given, by parties to a dispute, in the published pleadings of their respective legal advocates and the formal decision of a Court of Law. Each and every such statement, therefore, affecting the conduct of either party, must be considered as depending absolutely upon public authority and pretending to no sort of guarantee for its truth obtainable from private sources of information—into none of which have I the will or power to enquire. My business confines itself to working a sum from arbitrary or imaginary figures: if these be correct, the result should follow as I give it—not otherwise. Nor would I attempt the working at all, had not the parties themselves begun by proposing the figures for examination. No fact has been purposely changed, although conversations, declared and described, could only be re-produced by a guess at something equivalent. Either party may—and one must have—exaggerated or extenuated or invented: my concern is exclusively with these presumable exaggerations and extenuations and inventions as they were presented to and decided upon by the Court of the Country, as they exist in print, and as they may be procured by anybody.

R. B.

(Letter to George Smith, Browning's publisher of Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, 8 March 1873, in New Letters of Robert Browning, ed. William Clyde DeVane and Kenneth Leslie Knickerbocker [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950], pp. 211-12. The editors remark that this paragraph is presumably an outline of Browning's "first defense against a libel action" [p. 211].)